

FITZPATRICK PERCY

JOCK OF THE
BUSHVELD

Percy Fitzpatrick
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Preface

“Sonny, you kin reckon it dead sure, thar’s something wrong ’bout a thing that don’t explain itself.”

That was Old Rocky’s advice, given three-and-twenty years ago – not forgotten yet, but, in this instance, respectfully ignored.

It happened some years ago, and this was the way of it: the Fox of Ballybothrem having served three generations – in his native Tipperary, in Kaffraria, and in the Transvaal – seemed entitled to a rest; and when, in the half-hour before ‘lights out,’ which is the Little People’s particular own, the demand came from certain Autocrats of the Nightgown: “Now, tell us something else!” it occurred to the Puzzled One to tell of Jock’s fight with the table leg. And that is how the trouble began. Those with experience will know what followed; and, for those less fortunate, the modest demand of one, comfortably tucked up tailorwise, and emphasising his points by excited hand-shakes with his toes, will convey the idea: “It must be *all true!* and don’t leave out *anything!*”

To such an audience a story may be told a hundred times, but it must be told, as Kipling says, “Just so!” that is, in the same way; because, even a romance (what a three-year-old once excused as “only a play tell”) must be true – to itself!

Once Jock had taken the field it was not long before the narrator found himself helped or driven over the pauses by quick suggestions from the Gallery; but there were days of fag and worry when thoughts lagged or strayed, and when slips were made, and then a vigilant and pitiless memory swooped like the striking falcon on its prey. There came a night when the story was of the Old Crocodile, and one in the Gallery – one of more exuberant fancy – seeing the gate open ran into the flower-strewn field of romance and by suggestive questions and eager promptings helped to gather a little posy: “And he caught the Crocodile by the tail, didn’t he?” “And he hung on and fought him, didn’t he?” “And the Old Crocodile flung him high into the air? High!” and, turning to the two juniors, added “quite as high as the house?” And the narrator – accessory by reason of a mechanical nod and an absent-minded “Yes” passed on, thinking it could all be put right next time. But there is no escape from the ‘tangled web’ when the Little People sit in judgment. It was months later when retribution came. The critical point of the story was safely passed when – Oh; the irony and poetic justice of it – it was the innocent tempter himself who laid his hand in solemn protest on the narrator’s shoulder and, looking him reproachfully in the eyes, said “Dad! You have left out the best part of all. Don’t you remember how...”

And the description which followed only emphasises the present writer’s unfitness for the task he has undertaken. In the text of the story and in the illustration by my friend Mr Caldwell (who was himself subjected to the same influence) there is left a loophole for fancy: it is open to any one to believe that Jock is just beginning or just ending his aerial excursion. The Important People are not satisfied; but then the page is not big enough to exhibit Jock at the top of that flight – of fancy!

From the date of that lesson it was apparent that reputations would suffer if the story of Jock were not speedily embodied in some durable and authoritative form, and during a long spell of ill health many of the incidents were retold in the form of letters to the Little People. Other Less Important Persons – grown-ups – read them and sometimes heard them, and so it came about that the story of Jock was to be printed for private circulation, for the Little People and their friends. Then the story was read in manuscript and there came still more ambitious counsels, some urging the human story of the early days, others the wild animal life of South Africa. Conscious of many deficiencies

the narrator has left two great fields practically untouched, adhering to the original idea – the story of Jock; and those who come into it, men and animals, come in because of him and the life in which he played so large a part. The attempt to adapt the original letters to the symmetry of a connected story involved, as one might have known, endless trouble and changes, necessitating complete re-writing of most parts; and the responsibility and work became still greater when, after a casual and unforeseen meeting, my friend Mr Caldwell accepted the suggestion to come out to South Africa and spend six months with us in order to study the game in its native bush and to know the conditions of the life and put that experience into the work of illustrating “Jock.”

The writer is well aware that, from the above causes and one other, there are grave inequalities in style and system, and in plane of phrase and thought, in different parts of the book. For this feature the ‘one other’ cause is alone put forward as a defence. The story belongs to the Little People, and their requirements were defined – “It must be *all true!* Don’t leave out *anything!*” It has been necessary to leave out a great deal; but the other condition has been fully and fairly complied with; for it is a true story from beginning to end. It is not a diary: incidents have been grouped and moved to get over the difficulty of blank days and bad spells, but there is no incident of importance or of credit to Jock which is not absolutely true. The severest trial in this connection was in the last chapter, which is bound to recall perhaps the most famous and most cherished of all dog stories. Much, indeed, would have been sacrificed to avoid that; but it was unthinkable that, for any reason, one should in the last words shatter the spell that holds Jock dear to those for whom his life is chronicled – the spell that lies in ‘a true story.’

Little by little the book has grown until it has come perilously near the condition in which it might be thought to have Pretensions. It has none! It is what it was: a simple record, compiled for the interest and satisfaction of some Little People, and a small tribute of remembrance and affection offered at the shrine of the old life and those who made it – tendered in the hope that some one better equipped with opportunities and leisure may be inspired to do justice to it and to them for the sake of our native land.

Chapter One. The Background

Of the people who live lonely lives, on the veld or elsewhere, few do so of their own free choice. Some there are shut off from all their kind – souls sheathed in some film invisible, through which no thrill of sympathy may pass; some barred by their self-consciousness, heart hungry still, who never learned in childhood to make friends; some have a secret or a grief; some, thoughts too big or bad for comradeship. But most will charge to Fate the thoughtless choice, the chance, or hard necessity, that drew or drove them to the life apart; they know the lesson that was learned of old: “It is not good for man to be alone.”

Go out among them, ever moving on, whose white bones mark the way for others’ feet – who shun the cities, living in the wilds, and move in silence, self-contained. Who knows what they think, or dream, or hope, or suffer? Who can know? For speech among that hard-schooled lot is but a half-remembered art.

Yet something you may guess, since with the man there often goes – his dog; his silent tribute to The Book. Oh, it’s little they know of life who cannot guess the secret springs of loneliness and love that prompt the keeping of a trifling pet; who do not know what moves a man who daily takes his chance of life and death – man whose “breath is in his nostrils” – to lay his cheek against the muzzle of his comrade dog, and in the trackless miles of wilderness feel he has a friend. Something to hold to; something to protect.

There was old Blake – “mad, quite mad,” as everybody knew – of whom they vaguely said that horses, hounds, coaches, covers, and all that goes with old estates, were his – once. We knew him poor and middle-aged. How old to us! Cheery and unpractical, with two old pointers and a fowling-piece, and a heart as warm as toast. We did not ask each other’s business there; and, judging by the dogs and gun, we put him down as a ‘remittance man.’ But that, it seems, was wrong. They were his all.

He left no letters – a little pile of paper ash; no money and no food! That was his pride. He would not sell or give away his dogs! That was his love. When he could not keep them it seemed time to go! That was his madness. But before he went, remembering a friend in hospital, he borrowed two cartridges and brought him in a brace of birds. That was old mad Blake, who ‘moved on’ and took his dogs with him, because they had always been together, and he could not leave their fate to chance. So we buried him with one on either side, just as he would have liked it!

There was Turner, who shot the crocodile that seized his dog, and reckless of the others, swam in and brought the dog to land.

There was the dog that jumped in when his master slipped from the rock, and, swimming beside him, was snapped down in his stead! And there was the boy who tried a rescue in the dark – when a rustle, yelp and growl told that the lions had his dog – and was never seen again.

So it goes, and so it went, from year to year: a little showing now and then, like the iceberg’s tip, from which to guess the bulk below.

There was a Boy who went to seek his fortune. Call him boy or man: the years proved nothing either way! Some will be boyish always; others were never young: a few – most richly dowered few – are man and boy together. He went to seek his fortune, as boys will and should; no pressure on him from about; no promise from beyond. For life was easy there, and all was pleasant, as it may be – in a cage. ‘To-day’ is sure and happy; and there is no ‘to-morrow’ – in a cage.

There were friends enough – all kind and true – and in their wisdom they said: “Here it is safe: yonder all is chance, where many indeed are called, but few – so few – are chosen. Many have gone forth; some to return, beaten, hopeless, and despised; some to fall in sight outside; others are lost, we know not where; and ah! so few are free and well. But the fate of numbers is unheeded still; for

the few are those who count, and lead; and those who follow do not think 'How few,' but cry 'How strong! How free!' Be wise and do not venture. Here it is safe: there is no fortune there!"

But there was something stronger than the things he knew, around, without, beyond – the thing that strove within him: that grew and grew, and beat and fought for freedom: that bade him go and walk alone and tell his secret on the mountain slopes to one who would not laugh – a little red retriever; that made him climb and feel his strength, and find an outlet for what drove within. And thus the end was sure; for of all the voices none so strong as this! And only those others reached him that would chime with it; the gentle ones which said: "We too believe," and one, a stronger, saying: "Fifty years ago I did it. I would do it now again!"

So the Boy set out to seek his fortune, and did not find it; for there was none in the place where he sought. Those who warned him were – in the little – right: yet was he – in the greater – right too! It was not given to him as yet to know that fortune is not in time or place or things; but, good or bad, in the man's own self for him alone to find and prove.

Time and place and things had failed him; still was effort right; and, when the first was clear beyond all question, it was instinct and not knowledge bade him still go on, saying: "Not back to the cage. Anything but that!"

When many days had passed, it was again a friend who met him, saying: "Commonsense is not cowardice. You have made a mistake: repair it while you may. I have seen and know: there is nothing here. Come back with me, and all will be made easy." And answer, in reason, there was none; for the little truth was all too plain, and the greater not yet seen. But that which had swelled to bursting and had fought within for freedom called out: "Failure is the worst of all!" And the blind and struggling instinct rose against all knowledge and all reason. "Not back to the cage! Not that!"

And the heart that had once been young spoke up for Auld Lang Syne: the old eyes softened and dropped: "God speed you, Boy – Good-bye!" And as the mail-coach rumbled off the Boy put up his head – to try again.

The days passed, and still there was no work to do. For, those who were there already – hardened men and strong, pioneers who had roughed it – were themselves in straitened case, and it was no place for boys.

So the Boy moved on again, and with him a man in, equal plight, but, being a man, a guide and comfort to the Boy, and one to lead him on the way. Hungry, they walked all day; yet when the sun went down and light began to fail the place where work and food and sleep should be was still far off. The mountain tracks were rough and all unknown; the rivers many, cold and swift: the country wild; none lived, few ever passed, that way. When night closed in the Boy walked on in front, and the man lagged wearily, grumbling at their luck. In the valley at the mountain foot they came at midnight upon water, black and still, between them and the cabin's lights beyond; and there the man lay down. Then the Boy, turning in his anger, bade him come on; and, dragging him out upon the further bank, had found – unknowing – some little of the fortune he had come to seek.

Still, morning brought no change; still, was there no work to do. So the man gave up, and sagging back, was lost. And the Boy went on alone.

Rough and straight-spoken, but kindly men and true, were those he came among. What they could they did: what they had they gave. They made him free of board and bed; and, kinder still, now and then made work for him to do, knowing his spirit was as theirs and that his heart cried out: "Not charity, but work! Give me work!" But that they could not do, for there was no work they could not do themselves.

Thus the days and weeks went by. Willing, but unused to fend for himself – unfit by training for the wild rough life, heart and energy all to waste, the little he did know of no value there – the struggle with the ebbing tide went on; it was the wearing hopeless fight against that which one cannot grapple, and cannot even see. There was no work to be done. A few days here and there; a little passing job; a helping hand disguised; and then the quest again. They were all friendly – but, with the

kindly habit of the place: it told the tale of hopelessness too well. They did not even ask his name; it made no difference.

Then came a day when there was nowhere else to try. Among the lounging diggers at their week-end deals he stood apart – too shy, too proud to tell the truth; too conscious of it to trust his voice; too hungry to smile as if he did not care! And then a man in muddy moleskins, with grave face, brown beard, and soft blue eyes, came over to him, saying straight: “Boy, you come along o’ me!” And he went.

It was work – hard work. But the joy of it! Shovelling in the icy water, in mud and gravel, and among the boulders, from early dawn to dark. What matter? It was work. It was not for hire, but just to help one who had helped him; to ‘earn his grub’ and feel he was a man, doing the work of his friend’s partner, ‘who was away.’

For three full weeks the Boy worked on; grateful for the toil; grateful for the knowledge gained; most grateful that he could by work repay a kindness. And then the truth came out! The kindly fiction fell away as they sat and rested on the day of rest. “The claim could not stand two white men’s grub” had fallen from the man, accounting for his partner’s absence.

It was the simple and unstudied truth and calm unconsciousness of where it struck that gave the thrust its force; and in the clear still air of the Sunday morning the Boy turned hot and cold and dizzy to think of his folly, and of the kindness he had so long imposed upon. It was a little spell before his lips would smile, and eyes and voice were firm enough to lie. Then he said gently: If he could be spared – he had not liked to ask before, but now the floods were over and the river turned perhaps it could be managed – he would like to go, as there were letters waiting, and he expected news.

Up the winding pathway over rocky ledge and grassy slope, climbing for an hour to the pass, the toil and effort kept the hot thoughts under. At the top the Boy sat down to rest. The green rock-crested mountains stood like resting giants all around: the rivers, silvered by the sun, threaded their ways between: the air was clear, and cool, and still. The world was very beautiful from there.

Far, far below – a brownish speck beside the silver streak – stood the cabin he had left. And, without warning, all came back on him. What he had mastered rose beyond control. The little child that lies hidden in us all reached out – as in the dark – for a hand to hold; and there was none. His arms went up to hide the mocking glory of the day, and, face buried in the grass, he sobbed: “Not worth my food!”

Science tells that Nature will recoup herself by ways as well defined as those that rule mechanics. The blood flows upward – and the brain’s awchirl; the ebb-tide sets – and there is rest. Whatever impulse sways the guiding hand, we know that often when we need it most there comes relief; gently, unbidden, unobserved.

The Boy slept, and there was peace awhile. Then came faint echoes of the waking thoughts – odd words shot out, of hope and resolution; murmured names of those at home. Once his hand went out and gently touched the turf, reaching for the friend and comrade of the past – one who knew his every mood, had heard his wildest dreams described, had seen him, hot-eyed, breathless, struggling to escape the cage; one to whom the boyish soul was often bared in foolish confidence; one who could see and hear and feel, yet never tell – a little red retriever left at home; and the boy stirred and sighed, for answer to the soft brown eyes.

No! It is not good for man to be alone. A wisp of drifting cloud came by, a breath of cooler air, and the fickle spirit of the mountain changed the day as with a wand. The Boy woke up shivering, dazed, bewildered: the mountain of his dreams had vanished; and his dog was not there! The cold driving mist had blotted out the world. Stronger and stronger grew the wind, driving the damp cold through and through; for on the bleak plateau of the mountain nothing broke its force.

Pale and shaken, and a little stiff, he looked about; then slowly faced the storm. It had not struck him to turn back.

The gusts blew stronger, and through the mist came rain, in single stinging drops – portents of the greater storm. Slowly, as he bent to breast it, the chilled blood warmed, and when the first thunderclap split overhead, and lost itself in endless roars and rumblings in the kloofs and hills around, there came a warmth about his heart and a light into his eye – mute thanksgiving that here was something he could battle with and be a man again.

On the top of the world the storms work all their fury. Only there come mist and wind and rain, thunder and lightning and hail together – the pitiless terrible hail: there, where the hare hiding in the grass may know it is the highest thing in all God’s world, and nearest to the storm – the one clear mark to draw the lightning – and, knowing, scurries to the sheltered slopes.

But the Boy pressed on – the little path a racing stream to guide him. Then in the one group of ghostly, mist-blurred rocks he stopped to drink; and, as he bent – for all the blackness of the storm – his face leaped out at him, reflected for one instant in the shallow pool; the blue-white flame of lightning, blinding his aching eyes, hissed down; the sickening smell of brimstone spread about; and crashing thunder close above his head left him dazed and breathless.

Heedless of the rain, blinking the blackness from his eyes, he sat still for head to clear, and limbs to feel their life again; and, as he waited, slowly there came upon a colder stiller air that other roar, so far, so dull, so uniform; so weird and terrifying – the voice of the coming hail.

Huddled beneath the shelving rock he watched the storm sweep by with awful battering din that swamped and silenced every other sound – the tearing, smashing hail that seemed to strip the mountain to its very bone.

Oh! the wanton fury of the hail; the wild, destructive charge of hordes of savage cavalry; the stamping, smashing sweep along the narrow strip where all the fury concentrates; the long black trail of death and desolation! The birds and beasts, the things that creep and fly, all know the portents, and all flee before it, or aside. But in the darkness – in the night or mist – the slow, the weak, the helpless, and the mothers with their young – for them is little hope.

The dense packed column swept along, ruthless, raging, and unheeding, overwhelming all... A sudden failing of its strength, a little straggling tail, and then – the silence!

The sun came out; the wind died down; light veils of mist came slowly by – bits of floating gossamer – and melted in the clear, pure air.

The Boy stepped out once more. Miles away the black column of the falling hail sped its appointed course. Under his feet, where all had been so green and beautiful, was battered turf, for the time transformed into a mass of dazzling brilliants, where jagged ice-stones caught the sunlight on their countless facets, and threw it back in one fierce flashing glare, blinding in its brilliance.

On the glittering surface many things stood out.

In the narrow pathway near the spring a snake lay on its back, crushed and broken; beyond it, a tortoise, not yet dead, but bruised and battered through its shell; then a partridge – poor unprotected thing – the wet feathers lying all around, stripped as though a hawk had stricken it, and close behind it all the little brood; and further afield lay something reddish-brown – a buck – the large eyes glazed, an ooze of blood upon its lips and nose. He stooped to touch it, but drew back: the dainty little thing was pulp.

All striving for the sheltering rocks; all caught and stricken by the ruthless storm; and he, going on to face it, while others fled before – he, blindly fighting on – was spared. Was it luck? Or was there something subtle, more? He held to this, that more than chance had swayed the guiding hand of fate – that fortune holds some gifts in store for those who try; and faith resurgent moved him to a mute *Te Deum*, of which no more reached the conscious brain than: “It is good to be alive! But... better *so* than in the cage.”

Once more, a little of the fortune that he had come to seek!

At sunset, passing down the long rough gorge, he came upon one battling with the flood to save his all – the white man struggling with the frightened beasts; the kaffir swept from off his feet; the

mad bewildered oxen yielding to the stream and heading downwards towards the falls – and in their utmost need the Boy swam in and helped!

And there the long slow ebb was stayed: the Boy was worth his food.

But how recall the life when those who made it set so little store by all that passed, and took its ventures for their daily lot; when those who knew it had no gift or thought to fix the colours of the fading past: the fire of youth; the hopes; the toil; the bright illusions gone! And now, the Story of a Dog to conjure up a face, a name, a voice, or the grip of a friendly hand! And the half-dreamed sound of the tramping feet is all that is left of the live procession long since passed: the young recruits; the laggards and the faint; the few who saw it through; the older men – grave-eyed, thoughtful, unafraid – who judged the future by the battered past, and who knew none more nor less than man – unconscious equals of the best and least; the grey-hued years; the thinning ranks; the summons answered, as they had lived – alone. The tale untold; and, of all who knew it, none left to picture now the life, none left to play a grateful comrade's part, and place their record on a country's scroll – the kindly, constant, nameless Pioneers!

Chapter Two. Into the Bushveld

“Distant hills are always green,” and the best gold further on. That is a law of nature – human nature – which is quite superior to facts; and thus the world moves on.

So from the Lydenburg Goldfields prospectors ‘humping their swags’ or driving their small pack-donkeys spread afield, and transport-riders with their long spans and rumbling waggons followed, cutting a wider track where traders with winding strings of carriers had already ventured on. But the hunters had gone first. There were great hunters whose names are known; and others as great who missed the accident of fame; and after them hunters who traded, and traders who hunted. And so too with prospectors, diggers, transport-riders and all.

Between the goldfields and the nearest port lay the Bushveld, and game enough for all to live on.

Thus, all were hunters of a sort, but the great hunters – the hunters of big game – were apart; we were the smaller fry, there to admire and to imitate.

Trophies, carried back with pride or by force of habit, lay scattered about, neglected and forgotten, round the outspans, the tents of lone prospectors, the cabins of the diggers, and the grass wayside shanties of the traders. How many a ‘record’ head must have gone then, when none had thought of time or means to save them! Horns and skins lay in jumbled heaps in the yards or sheds of the big trading stores. The splendid horns of the Koodoo and Sable, and a score of others only less beautiful, could be seen nailed up in crude adornment of the roughest walls; nailed up, and then unnoticed and forgotten! And yet not quite! For although to the older hands they were of no further interest, to the new-comer they spoke of something yet to see, and something to be done; and the sight set him dreaming of the time when he too would go a-hunting and bring his trophies home.

Perched on the edge of the Berg, we overlooked the wonder-world of the Bushveld, where the big game roamed in thousands and the “wildest tales were true.” Living on the fringe of a hunter’s paradise, most of us were drawn into it from time to time, for shorter or longer spells, as opportunity and our circumstances allowed; and little by little one got to know the names, appearances, and habits of the many kinds of game below. Long talks in the quiet nights up there under waggons, in grass shelters in the woods, or in the wattle-and-daub shanties of the diggers, where men passed to and fro and swapped lies, as the polite phrase went, were our ‘night’s entertainments,’ when younger hands might learn much that was useful and true, and more that was neither.

It was a school of grown-up schoolboys; no doubt a hard one, but it had its playground side, and it was the habit of the school to ‘drop on to’ any breach of the unwritten laws, to ‘rub in’ with remorseless good humour the mistakes that were made, and to play upon credulity with a shamelessness and nerve quite paralysing to the judgment of the inexperienced. Yet, with it all, there was a kindness and quick instinct of ‘fair doos’ which tempered the wind and, in the main, gave no one more than was good for him.

There the new boy had to run the gauntlet, and, if without a watchful instinct or a friendly hint, there was nothing to warn him of it. When Faulkner – dragged to the piano – protested that he remembered nothing but a mere ‘morceau,’ he was not conscious of transgression, but a delighted audience caught up the word, and thenceforth he was known only as ‘Ankore’ – Harry the Sailor having explained that ‘more so’ was a recognised variant.

“Johnny-come-lately’s got to learn” was held to be adequate reason for letting many a beginner buy his experience, while those who had been through it all watched him stumble into the well-known pitfalls. It would no doubt have been a much more comfortable arrangement all round had there been a polite ignoring of each other’s blunders and absurdities. But that is not the way of schools where the spirit of fun plays its useful part; and, after all, the lesson well ‘rubbed in’ is well remembered.

The new assayer, primed by us with tales of Sable Antelope round Macmac Camp, shot old Jim Hill's only goat, and had to leave the carcass with a note of explanation – Jim being out when he called. What he heard from us when he returned, all prickly with remorse and shame, was a liberal education; but what he remembers best is Jim's note addressed that evening to our camp:

“Boys! Jim Hill requests your company to dinner to-morrow, Sunday!”

“Mutton!”

As the summer spent itself, and whispers spread around of new strikes further on, a spirit of restlessness – a touch of trek fever – came upon us, and each cast about which way to try his luck. Our camp was the summer headquarters of two transport-riders, and when many months of hard work, timber-cutting on the Berg, contracting for the Companies, pole-slipping in the bush, and other things, gave us at last a ‘rise,’ it seemed the natural thing to put it all into waggons and oxen, and go transport-riding too.

The charm of a life of freedom and complete independence – a life in which a man goes as and where he lists, and carries his home with him – is great indeed; but great too was the fact that hunting would go with it.

How the little things that mark a new departure stamp themselves indelibly on the memory! A flower in the hedgerow where the roads divide will mark the spot in one's mind for ever; and yet a million more, before and after, and all as beautiful, are passed unseen. In memory, it is all as fresh, bright and glorious as ever: only the years have gone. The start, the trek along the plateau, the crystal streams, the ferns and trees, the cool pure air; and, through and over all, the quite intoxicating sense of freedom! Then came the long slow climb to Spitzkop where the Berg is highest and where our ascent began. For there, with Africa's contrariness, the highest parts banked up and buttressed by gigantic spurs are most accessible from below, while the lower edges of the plateau are cut off sheer like the walls of some great fortress. There, near Spitzkop, we looked down upon the promised land; there, stood upon the outmost edge, as a diver on his board, and paused and looked and breathed before we took the plunge.

It is well to pitch one's expectations low, and so stave off disappointments. But counsels of perfection are wasted on the young, and when accident combines with the hopefulness of youth to lay the colours on in all their gorgeousness, what chance has Wisdom?

“See here, young feller!” said Wisdom, “don't go fill yourself up with tomfool notions 'bout lions and tigers waitin' behind every bush. You won't see one in a twelvemonth! Most like you won't see a buck for a week! You don't know what to do, what to wear, how to walk, how to look, or what to look for; and you'll make as much noise as a traction engine. This ain't open country: it's bush; they can see and hear, and you can't. An' as for big game, you won't see any for a long while yet, so don't go fool yourself!”

Excellent! But fortune in a sportive mood ordained that the very first thing we saw as we outspanned at Saunderson's on the very first day in the Bushveld, was the fresh skin of a lion stretched out to dry. What would the counsels of Solomon himself have weighed against that wet skin?

Wisdom scratched its head and stared: “Well, I am completely sugared!”

Of course it was a fluke. No lions had been seen in the locality for several years; but the beginner, filled with all the wildest expectations, took no heed of that. If the wish be father to the thought, then surely fact may well beget conviction. It was so in this case, at any rate, and thus not all the cold assurances of Wisdom could banish visions of big game as plentiful as partridges.

A party had set out upon a tiger hunt to clear out one of those marauders who used to haunt the kloofs of the Berg and make descents upon the Kaffir herds of goats and sheep; but there was a special interest in this particular tiger, for he had killed one of the white hunters in the last attempt to get at him a few weeks before. Starting from the store, the party of men and boys worked their way towards the kloof, and the possibility of coming across a lion never entered their heads. No notice was taken of smaller game put up from time to time as they moved carelessly along; a rustle on the left

of the line was ignored, and Bill Saunderson was as surprised as Bill ever could be to see a lion facing him at something like six or seven yards. The lion, with head laid level and tail flicking ominously, half crouched for its spring. Bill's bullet glanced along the skull, peeling off the skin. "It was a bad shot," he said afterwards, in answer to the beginner's breathless questions. "He wasn't hurt: just sank a little like a pointer when you check him; but before he steadied up again I took for the nose and got him. You see," he added thoughtfully, "a lion's got no forehead: it is all hair."

That was about all he had to say; but, little store as he may have set on it, the tip was never forgotten and proved of much value to at least one of our party years afterwards. To this day the picture of a lion brings up that scene – the crouching beast, faced by a man with a long brown beard, solemn face, and clear unfaltering eyes; the swift yet quiet action of reloading; and the second shot an inch or so lower, because "a lion's got no forehead: it's all hair."

The shooting of a lion, fair and square, and face to face, was the Blue Riband of the Bush, and no detail would have seemed superfluous; but Bill, whose eye nothing could escape, had, like many great hunters, a laggard tongue. Only now and then a look of grave amusement lighted up his face to show he recognised the hungry enthusiasm and his own inability to satisfy it. The skin with the grazed stripe along the nose, and the broken skull, were handled and looked at many times, and the story was pumped from every Kaffir – all voluble and eager, but none eye-witnesses. Bob, the sociable and more communicative, who had been nearest his brother, was asked a hundred questions, but all he had to say was that the grass was too long for him to see what happened: he reckoned that it was "a pretty near thing after the first shot; but Bill's all right!"

To me it was an absurd and tiresome affectation to show interest in any other topic, and when, during that evening, conversation strayed to other subjects, it seemed waste of time and priceless opportunity. Bob responded good-naturedly to many crude attempts to head them back to the entrancing theme, but the professional interest in rates, loads, rivers, roads, disease, drought, and 'fly,' was strong in the older transport-riders, as it should have been, but, for the time at least, was not, in me. If diplomacy failed, however, luck was not all out; for when all the pet subjects of the road had been thrashed out, and it was about time to turn in, a stray question brought the reward of patience.

"Have you heard if Jim reached Durban all right?"

"Yes! Safely shipped."

"You got some one to take him right through?"

"No! A Dutchman took him to Lydenburg, and I got Tom Hardy, going back empty, to take him along from there."

"What about feeding?"

"I sent some goats," said Bob, smiling for a moment at some passing thought, and then went on: "Tom said he had an old span that wouldn't mind it. We loaded him up at Parker's, and I cleared out before he got the cattle up. But they tell me there was a gay jamboree when it came to inspanning; and as soon as they got up to the other waggons and the young bullocks winded Jim, they started off with their tails up – a regular stampede, voorloopers and drivers yelling like mad, all the loose things shaking out of the waggons, and Tom nearly in a fit from running, shouting and swearing."

Judging by the laughter, there was only one person present who did not understand the joke, and I had to ask – with some misgiving – who was this Jim who needed so much care and feeding, and caused such a scare.

There was another burst of laughter as they guessed my thoughts, and it was Bob who answered me: "Only a lion, lad – not a wild man or a lunatic! Only a young lion! Sold him to the Zoo, and had to deliver him in Durban."

"Well, you fairly took me in with the name!"

"Oh! Jim? Well that's his pet name. His real name is Dabulamanzi. Jim, my hunting boy, caught him, so we call him Jim out of compliment," he added with a grin. "But Jim called him Dabulamanzi, also out of compliment, and I think that was pretty good for a nigger."

“You see,” said Bob, for the benefit of those who were not up in local history, “Dabulamanzi, the big fighting General in the Zulu War, was Jim’s own chief and leader; and the name means ‘The one who conquers the waters.’”

Then one of the others exclaimed: “Oh! Of course, that’s how you got him, isn’t it: caught him in a river? Tell us what did happen, Bob. What’s the truth of it? It seemed a bit steep as I heard it.”

“Well, it’s really simple enough. We came right on to the lioness waiting for us, and I got her; and then there were shouts from the boys, and I saw a couple of cubs, pretty well grown, making off in the grass. This boy Jim legged it after one of them, a cub about as big as a Newfoundland dog – not so high, but longer. I followed as fast as I could, but he was a big Zulu and went like a buck, yelling like mad all the time. We were in the bend of one of the long pools down near the Komati, and when I got through the reeds the cub was at the water’s edge facing Jim, and Jim was dancing around heading it off with only one light stick. As soon as it saw us coming on, the cub took to the water, and Jim after it. It was as good as a play. Jim swam up behind, and putting his hand on its head ducked it right under: the cub turned as it came up and struck out at him viciously, but he was back out of reach: when it turned again to go Jim ducked it again, and it went on like that six or eight times, till the thing was half drowned and had no more fight in it. Then Jim got hold of it by the tail and swam back to us, still shouting and quite mad with excitement.

“Of course,” added Bob with a wag of his head, “you can say it was only a cub; but it takes a good man to go up naked and tackle a thing like that, with teeth and claws to cut you into ribbons.”

“Was Jim here to-day?” I asked, as soon as there was an opening. Bob shook his head with a kindly regretful smile. “No, Sonny, not here; you’d ’a’ heard him. Jim’s gone. I had to sack him. A real fine nigger, but a terror to drink, and always in trouble. He fairly wore me right out.”

We were generally a party of half a dozen – the owners of the four waggons, a couple of friends trading with Delagoa, a man from Swaziland, and – just then – an old Yankee hunter-prospecter. It was our holiday time, before the hard work with loads would commence, and we dawdled along feeding up the cattle and taking it easy ourselves.

It was too early for loads in the Bay, so we moved slowly and hunted on the way, sometimes camping for several days in places where grass and water were good; and that lion skin was the cause of many disappointments to me. Never a bush or ant-heap, never a donga or a patch of reeds, did I pass for many days after that without the conviction that something was lurking there. Game there was in plenty, no doubt, but it did not come my way. Days went by with, once or twice, the sight of some small buck just as it disappeared, and many times, the noise of something in the bush or the sound of galloping feet. Others brought their contributions to the pot daily, and there seemed to be no reason in the world why I alone should fail – no reason except sheer bad luck! It is difficult to believe you have made mistakes when you do not know enough to recognise them, and have no extent your own ignorance; and then bad luck is such an easy and such a flattering explanation! If I did not go so far on the easy road of excuse-making as to put all the failures down to bad luck, perhaps some one else deserves the credit.

One evening as we were lounging round the camp fire, Robbie, failing to find a soft spot for his head on a thorn log, got up reluctantly to fetch his blankets, exclaiming with a mock tragic air:

“The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right.”

We knew Robbie’s way. There were times when he would spout heroics, suggested by some passing trifle, his own face a marvel of solemnity the whole time, and only the amused expression in his spectacled grey eyes to show he was poking fun at himself. An indulgent smile, a chuckle, and the genial comment “Silly ass!” came from different quarters; for Robbie was a favourite. Only old Rocky maintained his usual gravity.

As Robbie settled down again in comfort, the old man remarked in level thoughtful tones: “I reckon the feller as said that was a waster, he chucked it!” There was a short pause in which I, in my ignorance, began to wonder if it was possible that Rocky did not know the source; or did he take

the quotation seriously? Then Robbie answered in mild protest: “It was a gentleman of the name of Hamlet who said it.”

“Well, you can bet he was no good, anyhow,” Rocky drawled out. “‘Jus’ my luck!’ is the waster’s motto!”

“They do say he was mad,” Robbie replied, as his face twitched with a pull-your-leg expression, “but he got off a lot of first-class things all the same – some of the best things ever said.”

“I da’ say; they mostly can. But a man as sets down and blames his luck is no good anyhow. He’s got no sand, and got no sense, and got no honesty! It ain’t the time’s wrong; it’s the man! It ain’t the job’s too big; it’s the man’s too little!”

“You don’t believe in luck at all, Rocky?” I ventured to put in.

“I don’t say thar’s no such thing as luck – good and bad; but it ain’t the explanation o’ success an’ failure – not by a long way. No, sirree, luck’s just the thing any man’d like ter believe is the reason for his failure and another feller’s success. But it ain’t so. When another man pulls off what you don’t, the first thing you got ter believe is it’s your own fault; and the last, it’s his luck. And you jus’ got ter wade in an’ find out whar you went wrong, an’ put it right, ’thout any excuses an’ explanations.”

“But, Rocky, explanations aren’t always excuses, and sometimes you really have to give them!”

“Sonny, you kin reckon it dead sure thar’s something wrong ’bout a thing that don’t explain itself; an’ one explanation’s as bad as two mistakes – it don’t fool anybody worth speaking of, ’cept yerself. You find the remedy; you can leave other folks put up the excuses.”

I was beaten. It was no use going on, for I knew he was right. I suppose the other fellows also knew whom he was getting at, but they said nothing; and the subject seemed to have dropped, when Rocky, harking back to Robbie’s quotation, said, with a ghost of a smile: “I reckon ef that sharp o’ your’n hed ter keep the camp in meat we’d go pretty nigh hungry.”

But it seemed a good deal to give up all at once – the bad luck, the excuses and explanations, and the comfort they afforded; and I could not help thinking of that wretched wrong-headed stembuck that had actually allowed me to pass it, and then cantered away behind me.

Rocky, known, liked and respected by all, yet intimate with none, was ‘going North’ – even to the Zambesi, it was whispered – but no one knew where or why. He was going off alone, with two pack-donkeys and not even a boy for company, on a trip of many hundreds of miles and indefinite duration. No doubt he had an idea to work out; perhaps a report of some trader or hunter or even native was his pole-star: most certainly he had a plan, but what it was no living soul would know. That was the way of his kind. With them there was no limit in time or distance, no hint of purpose or direction, no home, no address, no ‘people’; perhaps a partner somewhere or a chum, as silent as themselves, who would hear some day – if there was anything to tell.

Rocky had worked near our camp on the Berg. I had known him to nod to, and when we met again at one of the early outspans in the Bush and offered a lift for him and his packs he accepted and joined us, it being still a bit early to attempt crossing the rivers with pack-donkeys. It may be that the ‘lift’ saved his donkeys something on the roughest roads and in the early stages; or it may be that we served as a useful screen for his movements, making it difficult for any one else to follow his line and watch him. Anyway, he joined us in the way of those days: that is, we travelled together and as a rule we grubbed together; yet each cooked for himself and used his own stores, and in principle we maintained our separate establishments. The bag alone was common; each man brought what game he got and threw it into the common stock.

The secret of agreement in the veld is – complete independence! Points of contact are points of friction – nowhere more so; and the safest plan is, each man his own outfit and each free to feed or sleep or trek as and when he chooses. I have known partners and friends who would from time to time move a trek apart, or a day apart, and always camp apart when they rejoined; and so remain friends.

Rocky – in full, Rocky Mountain Jack – had another name, but it was known to few besides the Mining Commissioner’s clerk who registered his licences from time to time. “In the Rockies whar I

was raised” is about the only remark having deliberate reference to his personal history which he was known to have made; but it was enough on which to found the name by which we knew him.

What struck me first about him was the long Colt’s revolver, carried on his hip; and for two days this ‘gun,’ as he called it, conjured up visions of Poker Flat and Roaring Camp, Jack Hamlin and Yuba Bill of cherished memory; and then the inevitable question got itself asked:

“Did you ever shoot a man, Rocky?”

“No, Sonny,” he drawled gently, “never hed ter use it yet!”

“It looks very old. Have you had it long?”

“Jus’ ’bout thirty years, I reckon!”

“Oh! Seems a long time to carry a thing without using it!”

“Waal,” he answered half absently, “that’s so. It’s a thing you don’t want orfen – but when you do, you want it derved bad!”

Rocky seemed to me to have stepped into our life out of the pages of Bret Harte. For me the glamour of romance was cast by the Master’s spell over all that world, and no doubt helped to make old Rocky something of a hero in the eyes of youth; but such help was of small account, for the cardinal fact was Rocky himself. He was a man.

There did not seem to be any known region of the earth where prospectors roam that he had not sampled, and yet whilst gleaned something from every land, his native flavour clung to him unchanged. He was silent by habit and impossible to draw; not helpful to those who looked for short cuts, yet kindly and patient with those who meant to try; he was not to be exploited, and had an illuminating instinct for what was not genuine. He had ‘no use for short weight’ – and showed it!

I used to watch him in the circle round the fire at nights, his face grave, weather-stained and wrinkled, with clear grey eyes and long brown beard, slightly grizzled then – watch and wonder why Rocky, experienced, wise and steadfast, should – at sixty – be seeking still. Were the prizes so few in the prospector’s life? or was there something wanting in him too? Why had he not achieved success?

It was not so clear then that ideals differ. Rocky’s ideal was the life – not the escape from it. There was something – sentiment, imagination, poetry, call it what you will – that could make common success seem to him common indeed and cheap! To follow in a new rush, to reap where another had sown, had no charm for him. It may be that an inborn pride disliked it; but it seems more likely that it simply did not attract him. And if – as in the end I thought – Rocky had taken the world as it is and backed himself against it – living up to his ideal, playing a ‘lone hand’ and playing it fair in all conditions, treading the unbeaten tracks, finding his triumph in his work, always moving on and contented so to end: the crown, “He was a man!” – then surely Rocky’s had achieved success!

That is Rocky, as remembered now! A bit idealised? Perhaps so: but who can say! In truth he had his sides and the defects of his qualities, like every one else; and it was not every one who made a hero of him. Many left him respectfully alone; and something of their feeling came to me the first time I was with him, when a stupid chatterer talked and asked too much. He was not surly or taciturn, but I felt frozen through by a calm deadly unresponsiveness which anything with blood and brain should have shrunk under. The dull monotone, the ominous drawl, the steady something in his clear calm eyes which I cannot define, gave an almost corrosive effect to innocent words and a voice of lazy gentleness.

“What’s the best thing to do following up a wounded buffalo?” was the question. The questions sprang briskly, as only a ‘yapper’ puts them; and the answers came like reluctant drops from a filter. “Git out!”

“Yes, but if there isn’t time?”

“Say yer prayers!”

“No – seriously – what is the best way of tackling one?”

“Ef yer wawnt to know, thar’s only one way: Keep cool and shoot straight!”

“Oh! of course —*if you can?*”

“An’ ef you can’t,” he added in fool-killer tones, “best stay right home!”

Rocky had no fancy notions: he hunted for meat and got it as soon as possible; he was seldom out long, and rarely indeed came back empty-handed. I had already learnt not to be too ready with questions. It was better, so Rocky put it, “to keep yer eyes open and yer mouth shut”; but the results at first hardly seemed to justify the process. At the end of a week of failures and disappointments all I knew was that I knew nothing – a very notable advance it is true, but one quite difficult to appreciate! Thus it came to me in the light of a distinction when one evening, after a rueful confession of blundering made to the party in general, Rocky passed a brief but not unfriendly glance over me and said, “On’y the born fools stays fools. You’ll git ter learn bymbye; you ain’t always yappin’!”

It was not an extravagant compliment; but failure and helplessness act on conceit like water on a starched collar: mine was limp by that time, and I was grateful for little things – most grateful when next morning, as we were discussing our several ways, he turned to me and asked gently, “Comin’ along, Boy?”

Surprise and gratitude must have produced a touch of effusiveness which jarred on him; for, to the eager exclamation and thanks, he made no answer – just moved on, leaving me to follow. In his scheme of life there was ‘no call to slop over.’

There was a quiet unhesitating sureness and a definiteness of purpose about old Rocky’s movements which immediately inspired confidence. We had not been gone many minutes before I began to have visions of exciting chases and glorious endings, and as we walked silently along they took possession of me so completely that I failed to notice the difference between his methods and mine. Presently, brimful of excitement and hope, I asked cheerily what he thought we would get. The old man stopped and with a gentle graveness of look and a voice from which all trace of tartness or sarcasm was banished, said, “See, Sonny! If you been useter goin’ round like a dawg with a tin it ain’t any wonder you seen nothin’. You got ter walk soft an’ keep yer head shut!”

In reply to my apology he said that there was “no bell an’ curtain in this yere play; you got ter be thar waitin’.”

Rocky knew better than I did the extent of his good nature; he knew that in all probability it meant a wasted day; for, with the best will in the world, the beginner is almost certain to spoil sport. It looks so simple and easy when you have only read about it or heard others talk; but there are pitfalls at every step. When, in what seemed to me perfectly still air, Rocky took a pinch of dust and let it drop, and afterwards wet one finger and held it up to feel which side cooled, it was not difficult to know that he was trying the wind; but when he changed direction suddenly for no apparent reason, or when he stopped and, after a glance at the ground, slackened his frame, lost all interest in sport, wind and surroundings, and addressed a remark to me in ordinary tones, I was hopelessly at sea. His manner showed that some possibility was disposed of and some idea abandoned. Once he said “Rietbuck! Heard us I reckon,” and then turned off at a right-angle; but a little later on he pointed to other spoor and, indifferently dropping the one word ‘Koodoo,’ continued straight on. To me the two spoors seemed equally fresh; he saw hours’ – perhaps a whole day’s – difference between them. That the rietbuck, scared by us, had gone ahead and was keenly on the watch for us and therefore not worth following, and that the koodoo was on the move and had simply struck across our line and was therefore not to be overtaken, were conclusions he drew without hesitation. I only saw spoor and began to palpitate with thoughts of bagging a koodoo bull.

We had been out perhaps an hour, and by unceasing watchfulness I had learnt many things: they were about as well learnt and as useful as a sentence in a foreign tongue got off by heart; but to me they seemed the essentials and the fundamentals of hunting. I was feeling very pleased with myself and confident of the result; the stumbling over stones and stumps had ceased; and there was no more catching in thorns, crunching on bare gritty places, clinking on rocks, or crackling of dry twigs; and as we moved on in silence the visions of koodoo and other big game became very real. There was nothing to hinder them: to do as Rocky did had become mechanically easy; a glance in

his direction every now and then was enough; there was time and temptation to look about and still perhaps to be the first to spot the game.

It was after taking one such casual glance around that I suddenly missed Rocky: a moment later I saw him moving forward, fast but silently, under cover of an ant-heap – stooping low and signing to me with one hand behind his back. With a horrible feeling of having failed him I made a hurried step sideways to get into line behind him and the ant-heap, and I stepped right on to a pile of dry crackly sticks. Rocky stood up quietly and waited, while I wished the earth would open and swallow me. When I got up abreast he half turned and looked me over with eyes slightly narrowed and a faint but ominous smile on one side of his mouth, and drawled out gently:

“You’d oughter brought some fire crackers!” If only he had sworn at me it would have been endurable.

We moved on again and this time I had eyes for nothing but Rocky’s back, and where to put my foot next. It was not very long before he checked in mid-stride and I stood rigid as a pointer. Peering intently over his shoulder in the direction in which he looked I could see nothing. The bush was very open, and yet, even with his raised rifle to guide me, I could not for the life of me see what he was aiming at. Then the shot rang out, and a duiker toppled over kicking in the grass not a hundred yards away.

The remembrance of certain things still makes me feel uncomfortable; the yell of delight I let out as the buck fell; the wild dash forward, which died away to a dead stop as I realised that Rocky himself had not moved; the sight of him, as I looked back, calmly reloading; and the silence. To me it was an event: to him, his work. But these things were forgotten then – lost behind the everlasting puzzle, How was it possible I had not seen the buck until it fell? Rocky must have known what was worrying me, for, after we had picked up the buck, he remarked without any preliminary, “It ain’t easy in this bush ter pick up what don’t move; an’ it ain’t hardly possible ter find what ye don’t know!”

“Game you mean?” I asked, somewhat puzzled.

“This one was feeding,” he answered, after a nod in reply. “I saw his head go up ter listen; but when they don’t move, an’ you don’t jus’ know what they look like, you kin ’most walk atop o’ them. You got ter kind o’ shape ’em in yer eye, an’ when you got that fixed you kin pick ’em up ’most anywhere!”

It cost Rocky an effort to volunteer anything. There were others always ready to talk and advise; but they were no help. It was Rocky himself who once said that “the man who’s allus offerin’ his advice fer nothin’ ’s askin’ ’bout’s much’s it’s worth.” He seemed to run dry of words – like an overdrawn well. For several days he took no further notice of me, apparently having forgotten my existence or repented his good nature. Once, when in reply to a question, I was owning up to the hopes and chances and failures of the day, I caught his attentive look turned on me and was conscious of it – and a little apprehensive – for the rest of the evening; but nothing happened.

The following evening however it came out. I had felt that that look meant something, and that sooner or later I would catch it. It was characteristic of him that he could always wait, and I never felt quite safe with him – never comfortably sure that something was not being saved up for me for some mistake perhaps days old. He was not to be hurried, nor was he to be put off, and nobody ever interrupted him or headed him off. His quiet voice was never raised, and the lazy gentleness never disturbed; he seemed to know exactly what he wanted to say, and to have opening and attention waiting for him. I suppose it was partly because he spoke so seldom: but there was something else too – the something that was just Rocky himself. Although the talk appeared the result of accident, an instinct told me from the start that it was not really so: it was Rocky’s slow and considered way.

The only dog with us was licking a cut on her shoulder – the result of an unauthorised rush at a wounded buck – and after an examination of her wound we had wandered over the account of how she had got it, and so on to discussing the dog herself. Rocky sat in silence, smoking and looking into the fire, and the little discussion was closed by some one saying, “She’s no good for a hunting

dog – too plucky!” It was then I saw Rocky’s eyes turned slowly on the last speaker: he looked at him thoughtfully for a good minute, and then remarked quietly:

“Thar ain’t no sich thing as too plucky!” And with that he stopped, almost as if inviting contradiction. Whether he wanted a reply or not one cannot say; anyway, he got none. No one took Rocky on unnecessarily; and at his leisure he resumed:

“Thar’s brave men; an’ thar’s fools; an’ you kin get some that’s both. But thar’s a whole heap that ain’t! An’ it’s jus’ the same with dawgs. She’s no fool, but she ain’t been taught: that’s what’s the matter with her. Men ha’ got ter larn: dawgs too! Men ain’t born equal: no more’s dawgs! One’s born better ’n another – more brains, more heart; but I ain’t yet heard o’ the man born with knowledge or experience; that’s what they got ter learn – men an’ dawgs! The born fool’s got to do fool’s work all the time: but the others larn; and the brave man with brains ’s got a big pull. He don’t get shook up – jus’ keeps on thinkin’ out his job right along, while the other feller’s worryin’ about his hide! An’ dawgs is the same.”

Rocky’s eyes – for ever grave and thoughtful – rested on the fire; and the remarks that came from the other men passed unnoticed, but they served to keep the subject alive. Presently he went on again – opening with an observation that caused me to move uneasily before there was time to think why!

“Boys is like pups – you got ter help ’em some; but not too much, an’ not too soon. They got ter larn themselves. I reckon ef a man’s never made a mistake he’s never had a good lesson. Ef you don’t pay for a thing you don’t know what it’s worth; and mistakes is part o’ the price o’ knowledge – the other part is work! But mistakes is the part you don’t like payin’: that’s why you remember it. You save a boy from makin’ mistakes and ef he’s got good stuff in him, most like you spoil it. He don’t know anything properly, ’cause he don’t think; and he don’t think, ’cause you saved him the trouble an’ he never learned how! He don’t know the meanin’ o’ consequences and risks, ’cause you kep’ ’em off him! An’ bymbye he gets ter believe it’s born in him ter go right, an’ knows everything, an’ can’t go wrong; an’ ef things don’t pan out in the end he reckon it’s jus’ bad luck! No! Sirree! Ef he’s got ter swim you let him know right there that the water’s deep an’ thar ain’t no one to hol’ him up, an’ ef he don’t wade in an’ larn, it’s goin’ ter be his funeral!”

My eyes were all for Rocky, but he was not looking my way, and when the next remark came, and my heart jumped and my hands and feet moved of their own accord, his face was turned quite away from me towards the man on his left.

“An’ it’s jus’ the same ’ith huntin’! It looks so blamed easy he reckons it don’t need any teachin’. Well, let him try! Leave him run on his own till his boots is walked off an’ he’s like to set down and cry, ef he wasn’t ’shamed to; let him know every pur-tickler sort o’ blamed fool he can make of himself; an’ then he’s fit ter teach, ’cause he’ll listen, an’ watch, an’ learn – at? say thank ye fer it! Mostly you got ter make a fool o’ yourself once or twice ter know what it feels like an’ how t’ avoid it: best do it young – it teaches a boy; but it kind o’ breaks a man up!”

I kept my eyes on Rocky, avoiding the others, fearing that a look or word might tempt some one to rub it in; and it was a relief when the old man naturally and easily picked up his original point and, turning another look on Jess, said:

“You got ter begin on the pup. It ain’t her fault; it’s yours. She’s full up o’ the right stuff, but she got no show to larn! Dawgs is all different, good an’ bad – just like men: some larns quick; some’ll never larn. But thar ain’t any too plucky!”

He tossed a chip of green wood into the heart of the fire and watched it spurtle and smoke, and after quite a long pause, added:

“Thar’s times when a dawg’s got to see it through an’ be killed. It’s his dooty – same as a man’s. I seen it done!”

The last words were added with a narrowing of his eyes and a curious softening of voice – as of personal affection or regret. Others noticed it too; and in reply to a question as to how it had

happened Rocky explained in a few words that a wounded buffalo had waylaid and tossed the man over its back, and as it turned again to gore him the dog rushed in between, fighting it off for a time and eventually fastening on to the nose when the buffalo still pushed on. The check enabled the man to reach his gun and shoot the buffalo; but the dog was trampled to death.

“Were you...?” some one began – and then at the look in Rocky’s face, hesitated. Rocky, staring into the fire, answered:

“It was my dawg!”

Long after the other men were asleep I lay in my blankets watching the tricks of light and shadow played by the fire, as fitfully it flamed or died away. It showed the long prostrate figures of the others as they slept full stretch on their backs, wrapped in dark blankets; the waggons, touched with unwonted colours by the flames, and softened to ghostly shadows when they died; the oxen, sleeping contentedly at their yokes; Rocky’s two donkeys, black and grey, tethered under a thorn-tree – now and then a long ear moving slowly to some distant sound and dropping back again satisfied. I could not sleep; but Rocky was sleeping like a babe. He, gaunt and spare – 6 foot 2 he must have stood – weather-beaten and old, with the long solitary trip before him and sixty odd years of life behind, he slept when he laid his head down, and was wide awake and rested when he raised it. He, who had been through it all, slept; but I, who had only listened, was haunted, bewitched, possessed, by racing thoughts; and all on account of four words, and the way he said them, “It was my dawg.”

It was still dark, with a faint promise of saffron in the East, when I felt a hand on my shoulder and heard Rocky’s voice saying, “Comin’ along, Sonny?”

One of the drivers raised his head to look at us as we passed, and then called to his voorlooper to turn the cattle loose to graze, and dropped back to sleep. We left them so and sallied out into the pure clear morning while all the world was still, while the air, cold and subtly stimulating, put a spring into the step and an extra beat or two into the pulse, fairly rinsing lungs and eyes and brain.

What is there to tell of that day? Why! nothing, really nothing, except that it was a happy day – a day of little things that all went well, and so it came to look like the birthday of the hunting. What did it matter to me that we were soaked through in ten minutes? for the dew weighed down the heavy-topped grass with clusters of crystal drops that looked like diamond sprays. It was all too beautiful for words: and so it should be in the spring-time of youth.

Rocky was different that day. He showed me things; reading the open book of nature that I could not understand. He pointed out the spoors going to and from the drinking-place, and named the various animals; showed me one more deeply indented than the rest and, murmuring “Scared I guess,” pointed to where it had dashed off out of the regular track; picked out the big splayed pad of the hyena sneaking round under cover; stopped quietly in his stride to point where a hare was sitting up cleaning itself, not ten yards off; stopped again at the sound of a clear, almost metallic, ‘clink’ and pointed to a little sandy gully in front of us down which presently came thirty or forty guinea-fowl in single file, moving swiftly, running and walking, and all in absolute silence except for that one ‘clink.’ How did he know they were there, and which way they would go, and know it all so promptly? were questions I asked myself.

We walked with the sun – that is towards the West – so that the light would show up the game and be in their eyes, making it more difficult for them to see us. We watched a little red stembuck get up from his form, shake the dew from his coat, stretch himself, and then pick his way daintily through the wet grass, nibbling here and there as he went. Rocky did not fire; he wanted something better.

After the sun had risen, flooding the whole country with golden light, and, while the dew lasted, making it glisten like a bespangled transformation scene, we came on a patch of old long grass and, parted by some twenty yards, walked through it abreast. There was a wild rush from under my feet, a yellowish body dashed through the grass, and I got out in time to see a rietbuck ram cantering away. Then Rocky, beside me, gave a shrill whistle; the buck stopped, side on, looked back at us, and Rocky dropped it where it stood. Instantly following the shot there was another rush on our left, and before

the second rietbuck had gone thirty yards Rocky toppled it over in its tracks. From the whistle to the second shot it was all done in about ten seconds. To me it looked like magic. I could only gasp.

We cleaned the bucks, and hid them in a bush. There was meat enough for the camp then, and I thought we would return at once for boys to carry it; but Rocky, after a moment's glance round, shouldered his rifle and moved on again. I followed, asking no questions. We had been gone only a few minutes when to my great astonishment he stopped and pointing straight in front asked:

“What 'ud you put up for that stump?” I looked hard, and answered confidently, “Two hundred!”

“Step it!” was his reply. I paced the distance; it was eighty-two yards.

It was very bewildering; but he helped me out a bit with “Bush telescopes, Sonny!”

“You mean it magnifies them?” I asked in surprise. “No! Magnifies the distance, like lookin' down an avenue! Gun barr'l looks a mile long when you put yer eye to it! Open flats brings 'em closer; and 'cross water or a gully seems like you kin put yer hand on 'em?”

“I would have missed – by feet – that time Rocky!”

“You kin take it fer a start, Halve the distance and aim low!”

“Aim low, as well?”

“Thar's allus somethin' low: legs, an' ground to show what you done! But thar's no 'outers' marked on the sky!”

Once, as we walked along, he paused to look at some freshly overturned ground, and dropped the one word, ‘Pig.’ We turned then to the right and presently came upon some vlei ground densely covered with tall green reeds. He slowed down as we approached; I tip-toed in sympathy; and when only a few yards off he stopped and beckoned me on, and as I came abreast he raised his hand in warning and pointed into the reeds. There was a curious subdued sort of murmur of many deep voices. It conveys no idea of the fact to say they were grunts. They were softened out of all recognition: there is only one word for it, they sounded ‘confidential.’ Then as we listened I could make out the soft silky rustling of the rich undergrowth, and presently, could follow, by the quivering and waving of odd reeds, the movements of the animals themselves. They were only a few yards from us – the nearest four or five; they were busy and contented; and it was obvious they were utterly unconscious of our presence. As we peered down to the reeds from our greater height it seemed that we could see the ground and that not so much as a rat could have passed unnoticed. Yet we saw nothing!

And then, without the slightest sign, cause or warning that I could detect, in one instant every sound ceased. I watched the reeds like a cat on the pounce: never a stir or sign or sound: they had vanished. I turned to Rocky: he was standing at ease, and there was the faintest look of amusement in his eyes.

“They must be there; they can't have got away?” It was a sort of indignant protest against his evident ‘chucking it’; but it was full of doubt all the same.

“Try!” he said, and I jumped into the reeds straight away. The under-foliage, it is true, was thicker and deeper than it had looked; but for all that it was like a conjuring trick – they were not there! I waded through a hundred yards or more of the narrow belt – it was not more than twenty yards wide anywhere – but the place was deserted. It struck me then that if they could dodge us at five to ten yards while we were watching from the bank and they did not know it – Well, I ‘chucked it’ too. Rocky was standing in the same place with the same faint look of friendly amusement when I got back, wet and muddy.

“Pigs is like that,” he said, “same as elephants – jus' disappears!”

We went on again, and a quarter of an hour later, it may be, Rocky stopped, subsided to a sitting position, beckoned to me, and pointed with his levelled rifle in front. It was a couple of minutes before he could get me to see the stembuck standing in the shade of a thorn-tree. I would never have seen it but for his whisper to look for something moving: that gave it to me; I saw the movement of the head as it cropped.

“High: right!” was Rocky’s comment, as the bullet ripped the bark off a tree and the startled stembuck raced away. In the excitement I had forgotten his advice already!

But there was no time to feel sick and disgusted; the buck, puzzled by the report on one side and the smash on the tree on the other, half circled us and stopped to look back. Rocky laid his hand on my shoulder:

“Take your time, Sonny!” he said, “Aim low; an’ *don’t full! Squeeze!*” And at last I got it.

We had our breakfast there – the liver roasted on the coals, and a couple of ‘dough-boys,’ with the unexpected addition of a bottle of cold tea, weak and unsweetened, produced from Rocky’s knapsack! We stayed there a couple of hours, and that is the only time he really opened out. I understood then – at last – that of his deliberate kindness he had come out that morning meaning to make a happy day of it for a youngster; and he did it.

He had the knack of getting at the heart of things, and putting it all in the fewest words. He spoke in the same slow grave way, with habitual economy of breath and words; and yet the pictures were living and real, and each incident complete. I seemed to get from him that morning all there was to know of the hunting in two great continents – Grizzlies and other ‘bar,’ Moose and Wapiti, hunted in the snows of the North West; Elephant, Buffalo, Rhino, Lions, and scores more, in the sweltering heat of Africa!

That was a happy day!

When I woke up next morning Rocky was fitting the packs on his donkeys. I was a little puzzled, wondering at first if he was testing the saddles, for he had said nothing about moving on; but when he joined us at breakfast the donkeys stood packed ready to start. Then Robbie asked:

“Going to make a move, Rocky?”

“Yes! Reckon I’ll git!” he answered quietly.

I ate in silence, thinking of what he was to face: many hundreds of miles – perhaps a thousand or two; many, many months – may be a year or two; wild country, wild tribes, and wild beasts; floods and fever; accident, hunger, and disease; and alone!

When we had finished breakfast he rinsed out his beaker and hung it on one of the packs, slung his rifle over his shoulder, and picking up his long assegai-wood walking-stick tapped the donkeys lightly to turn them into the Kaffir footpath that led away North. They jogged on into place in single file.

Rocky paused a second before following, turned one brief grave glance on us, and said!

“Well. So long!”

He never came back!

Chapter Three.

Jess

Good dogs were not easy to get; I had tried hard enough for one before starting, but without success. Even unborn puppies had jealous prospective owners waiting to claim them.

There is always plenty of room at the top of the tree, and good hunting dogs were as rare as good men, good horses, and good front oxen. A lot of qualities are needed in the make-up of a good hunting dog: size, strength, quickness, scent, sense and speed – and plenty of courage. They are very difficult to get; but even small dogs are useful, and many a fine feat stands to the credit of little terriers in guarding camps at night and in standing off wounded animals that meant mischief.

Dennison was saved from a wounded lioness by his two fox-terriers. He had gone out to shoot bush-pheasants, and came unexpectedly on a lioness playing with her cubs: the cubs hid in the grass, but she stood up at bay to protect them, and he, forgetting that he had taken the big ‘looper’ cartridges from his gun and reloaded with Number 6, fired. The shot only maddened her, and she charged; but the two dogs dashed at her, one at each side, barking, snapping and yelling, rushing in and jumping back so fast and furiously that they flustered her. Leaving the man for the moment, she turned on them, dabbing viciously with her huge paws, first at one, then at the other; quick as lightning she struck right and left as a kitten will at a twirled string; but they kept out of reach. It only lasted seconds, but that was long enough for the man to reload and shoot the lioness through the heart.

There was only the one dog in our camp; and she was not an attractive one. She was a bull-terrier with a dull brindled coat – black and grey in shadowy stripes. She had small cross-looking eyes and uncertain always-moving ears; she was bad tempered and most unsociable; but she was as faithful and as brave a dog as ever lived. She never barked; never howled when beaten for biting strangers or kaffirs or going for the cattle; she was very silent, very savage, and very quick. She belonged to my friend Ted, and never left his side day or night. Her name was Jess.

Jess was not a favourite, but everybody respected her, partly because you knew she would not stand any nonsense – no pushing, patting or punishment, and very little talking to – and partly because she was so faithful and plucky. She was not a hunting dog, but on several occasions had helped to pull down wounded game; she had no knowledge or skill, and was only fierce and brave, and there was always the risk that she would be killed. She would listen to Ted, but to no one else; one of us might have shouted his lungs out, but it would not have stopped her from giving chase the moment she saw anything and keeping on till she was too dead beat to move any further.

The first time I saw Jess we were having dinner, and I gave her a bone – putting it down close to her and saying, “Here! good dog!” As she did not even look at it, I moved it right under her nose. She gave a low growl, and her little eyes turned on me for just one look as she got up and walked away.

There was a snigger of laughter from some of the others, but nobody said anything, and it seemed wiser to ask no questions just then. Afterwards, when we were alone, one of them told me Ted had trained her not to feed from any one else, adding, “You must not feed another man’s dog; a dog has only one master!”

We respected Jess greatly; but no one knew quite how much we respected her until the memorable day near Ship Mountain.

We had rested through the heat of the day under a big tree on the bank of a little stream; it was the tree under which Soltké prayed and died. About sundown, just before we were ready to start, some other waggons passed, and Ted, knowing the owner, went on with him intending to rejoin us at the next outspan. As he jumped on to the passing waggon he called to Jess, and she ran out of a patch of soft grass under one of the big trees behind our waggons. She answered his call instantly, but when she saw him moving off on the other waggon she sat down in the road and watched him anxiously for

some seconds, then ran on a few steps in her curious quick silent way and again stopped, giving swift glances alternately towards Ted and towards us. Ted remarked laughingly that she evidently thought he had made a mistake by getting on to the wrong waggon, and that she would follow presently.

After he had disappeared she ran back to her patch of grass and lay down, but in a few minutes she was back again squatting in the road looking with that same anxious worried expression after her master. Thus she went to and fro for the quarter of an hour it took us to inspan, and each time she passed we could hear a faint anxious little whine.

The oxen were inspanned and the last odd things were being put up when one of the boys came to say that he could not get the guns and water-barrel because Jess would not let him near them. There was something the matter with the dog, he said; he thought she was mad.

Knowing how Jess hated kaffirs we laughed at the notion, and went for the things ourselves. As we came within five yards of the tree where we had left the guns there was a rustle in the grass, and Jess came out with her swift silent run, appearing as unexpectedly as a snake does, and with some odd suggestion of a snake in her look and attitude. Her head, body and tail were in a dead line, and she was crouching slightly as for a spring; her ears were laid flat back, her lips twitching constantly, showing the strong white teeth, and her cross wicked eyes had such a look of remorseless cruelty in them that we stopped as if we had been turned to stone. She never moved a muscle or made a sound, but kept those eyes steadily fixed on us. We moved back a pace or two and began to coax and wheedle her; but it was no good; she never moved or made a sound, and the unblinking look remained. For a minute we stood our ground, and then the hair on her back and shoulders began very slowly to stand up. That was enough: we cleared off. It was a mighty uncanny appearance.

Then another tried his hand; but it was just the same. No one could do anything with her; no one could get near the guns or the water-barrel; as soon as we returned for a fresh attempt she reappeared in the same place and in the same way.

The position was too ridiculous, and we were at our wits' end; for Jess held the camp. The kaffirs declared the dog was mad, and we began to have very uncomfortable suspicions that they were right; but we decided to make a last attempt, and surrounding the place approached from all sides. But the suddenness with which she appeared before we got into position so demoralised the kaffirs that they bolted, and we gave it up, owning ourselves beaten. We turned to watch her as she ran back for the last time, and as she disappeared in the grass we heard distinctly the cry of a very young puppy. Then the secret of Jess's madness was out.

We had to send for Ted, and when he returned a couple of hours later Jess met him out on the road in the dark where she had been watching half the time ever since he left. She jumped up at his chest giving a long tremulous whimper of welcome, and then ran ahead straight to the nest in the grass.

He took a lantern and we followed, but not too close. When he knelt down to look at the puppies she stood over them and pushed herself in between him and them; when he put out a hand to touch them she pushed it away with her nose, whining softly in protest and trembling with excitement – you could see she would not bite, but she hated him to touch her puppies. Finally, when he picked one up she gave a low cry and caught his wrist gently, but held it.

That was Jess, the mother of Jock!

Chapter Four.

The Pick of the Puppies

There were six puppies, and as the waggons were empty we fixed up a roomy nest in one of them for Jess and her family. There was no trouble with Jess; nobody interfered with her, and she interfered with nobody. The boys kept clear of her; but we used to take a look at her and the puppies as we walked along with the waggons; so by degrees she got to know that we would not harm them, and she no longer wanted to eat us alive if we went near and talked to her.

Five of the puppies were fat strong yellow little chaps with dark muzzles – just like their father, as Ted said; and their father was an imported dog, and was always spoken of as the best dog of the breed that had ever been in the country. I never saw him, so I do not really know what he was like – perhaps he was not a yellow dog at all; but, whatever he was, he had at that time a great reputation because he was ‘imported,’ and there were not half a dozen imported dogs in the whole of the Transvaal then. Many people used to ask what breed the puppies were – I suppose it was because poor cross faithful old Jess was not much to look at, and because no one had a very high opinion of yellow dogs in general, and nobody seemed to remember any famous yellow bull-terriers. They used to smile in a queer way when they asked the question, as if they were going to get off a joke; but when we answered “Just like their father – Buchanan’s *imported* dog,” the smile disappeared, and they would give a whistle of surprise and say “By Jove!” and immediately begin to examine the five yellow puppies, remark upon their ears and noses and legs, and praise them up until we were all as proud as if they had belonged to us.

Jess looked after her puppies and knew nothing about the remarks that were made, so they did not worry her, but I often looked at the faithful old thing with her dark brindled face, cross-looking eyes and always-moving ears, and thought it jolly hard lines that nobody had a good word for her; it seemed rough on her that every one should be glad there was only one puppy at all like the mother – the sixth one, a poor miserable little rat of a thing about half the size of the others. He was not yellow like them, nor dark brindled like Jess, but a sort of dirty pale half-and-half colour with some dark faint wavy lines all over him, as if he had tried to be brindled and failed; and he had a dark sharp wizened little muzzle that looked shrivelled up with age.

Most of the fellows said it would be a good thing to drown the odd one because he spoilt the litter and made them look as though they were not really thoroughbred, and because he was such a miserable little rat that he was not worth saving anyhow; but in the end he was allowed to live. I believe no one fancied the job of taking one of Jess’s puppies away from her; moreover, as any dog was better than none, I had offered to take him rather than let him be drowned. Ted had old friends to whom he had already promised the pick of the puppies, so when I came along it was too late, and all he could promise me was that if there should be one over I might have it.

As they grew older and were able to crawl about they were taken off the waggons when we outspanned and put on the ground. Jess got to understand this at once, and she used to watch us quite quietly as we took them in our hands to put them down or lift them back again. When they were two or three weeks old a man came to the waggons who talked a great deal about dogs, and appeared to know what had to be done. He said that the puppies’ tails ought to be docked, and that a bull-terrier would be no class at all with a long tail, but you should on no account clip his ears. I thought he was speaking of fox-terriers, and that with bull-terriers the position was the other way round, at that time; but as he said it was ‘the thing’ in England, and nobody contradicted him, I shut up. We found out afterwards that he had made a mistake; but it was too late then, and Jess’s puppies started life as bull-terriers up to date, with long ears and short tails.

I felt sure from the beginning that all the yellow puppies would be claimed and that I should have to take the odd one, or none at all; so I began to look upon him as mine already, and to take an interest in him and look after him. A long time ago somebody wrote that “the sense of possession turns sand into gold,” and it is one of the truest things ever said. Until it seemed that this queer-looking odd puppy was going to be mine I used to think and say very much what the others did – but with this difference, that I always felt sorry for him, and sorry for Jess too, because he was like her and not like the father. I used to think that perhaps if he were given a chance he might grow up like poor old Jess herself, ugly, cross and unpopular, but brave and faithful. I felt sorry for him, too, because he was small and weak, and the other five big puppies used to push him away from his food and trample on him; and when they were old enough to play they used to pull him about by his ears and pack on to him – three or four to one – and bully him horribly. Many a time I rescued him, and many a time gave him a little preserved milk and water with bread soaked in it when the others had shouldered him out and eaten everything.

After a little while, when my chance of getting one of the good puppies seemed hopeless and I got used to the idea that I would have to take the odd one, I began to notice little things about him that no one else noticed, and got to be quite fond of the little beggar – in a kind of way. Perhaps I was turning my sand into gold, and my geese into swans; perhaps I grew fond of him simply because, finding him lonely and with no one else to depend on, I befriended him; and perhaps it was because he was always cheerful and plucky and it seemed as if there might be some good stuff in him after all. Those were the things I used to think of sometimes when feeding the little outcast. The other puppies would tumble him over and take his food from him; they would bump into him when he was stooping over the dish of milk and porridge, and his head was so big and his legs so weak that he would tip up and go heels over head into the dish. We were always picking him out of the food and scraping it off him: half the time he was wet and sticky, and the other half covered with porridge and sand baked hard by the sun.

One day just after the waggons had started, as I took a final look round the outspan place to see if anything had been forgotten, I found the little chap – who was only about four inches high – struggling to walk through the long grass. He was not big enough or strong enough to push his way – even the stems of the down-trodden grass tripped him – and he stumbled and floundered at every step, but he got up again each time with his little tail standing straight up, his head erect, and his ears cocked. He looked such a ridiculous sight that his little tragedy of “lost in the veld” was forgotten – one could only laugh.

What he thought he was doing, goodness only knows; he looked as proud and important as if he owned the whole world and knew that every one in it was watching him. The poor little chap could not see a yard in that grass; and in any case he was not old enough to see much, or understand anything, for his eyes still had that bluish blind look that all very young puppies have, but he was marching along as full of confidence as a general at the head of his army. How he fell out of the waggon no one knew; perhaps the big puppies tumbled him out, or he may have tried to follow Jess, or have climbed over the tail-board to see what was the other side, for he was always going off exploring by himself. His little world was small, it may be – only the bed-plank of the waggon and the few square yards of the ground on which they were dumped at the outspans – but he took it as seriously as any explorer who ever tackled a continent.

The others were a bit more softened towards the odd puppy when I caught up to the waggons and told them of his valiant struggle to follow; and the man who had docked the puppies’ tails allowed, “I believe the rat’s got pluck, whatever else is the matter with him, for he was the only one that didn’t howl when I snipped them. The little cuss just gave a grunt and turned round as if he wanted to eat me. I think he’d ’a’ been terrible angry if he hadn’t been so s’prised. Pity he’s such an awful-looking mongrel.”

But no one else said a good word for him: he was really beneath notice, and if ever they had to speak about him they called him “The Rat.” There is no doubt about it he was extremely ugly, and instead of improving as he grew older, he became worse; yet, I could not help liking him and looking after him, sometimes feeling sorry for him, sometimes being tremendously amused, and sometimes – wonderful to relate – really admiring him. He was extraordinarily silent; while the others barked at nothing, howled when lonely, and yelled when frightened or hurt, the odd puppy did none of these things; in fact, he began to show many of Jess’s peculiarities; he hardly ever barked, and when he did it was not a wild excited string of barks but little suppressed muffled noises, half bark and half growl, and just one or two at a time; and he did not appear to be afraid of anything, so one could not tell what he would do if he was.

One day we had an amusing instance of his nerve: one of the oxen, sniffing about the outspan, caught sight of him all alone, and filled with curiosity came up to examine him, as a hulking silly old tame ox will do. It moved towards him slowly and heavily with its ears spread wide and its head down, giving great big sniffs at this new object, trying to make out what it was. “The Rat” stood quite still with his stumpy tail cocked up and his head a little on one side, and when the huge ox’s nose was about a foot from him he gave one of those funny abrupt little barks. It was as if the object had suddenly ‘gone off’ like a cracker, and the ox nearly tumbled over with fright; but even when the great mountain of a thing gave a clumsy plunge round and trotted off, “The Rat” was not the least frightened; he was startled, and his tail and ears flickered for a second, but stiffened up again instantly, and with another of those little barks he took a couple of steps forward and cocked his head on the other side. That was his way.

He was not a bit like the other puppies; if any one fired off a gun or cracked one of the big whips the whole five would yell at the top of their voices and, wherever they were, would start running, scrambling and floundering as fast as they could towards the waggon without once looking back to see what they were running away from. The odd puppy would drop his bone with a start or would jump round; his ears and tail would flicker up and down for a second; then he would slowly bristle up all over, and with his head cocked first on one side and then on the other, stare hard with his half-blind bluish puppy eyes in the direction of the noise; but he never ran away.

And so, little by little, I got to like him in spite of his awful ugliness. And it really was awful! The other puppies grew big all over, but the odd one at that time seemed to grow only in one part – his tummy! The poor little chap was born small and weak; he had always been bullied and crowded out by the others, and the truth is he was half starved. The natural consequence of this was that as soon as he could walk about and pick up things for himself he made up for lost time, and filled up his middle piece to an alarming size before the other parts of his body had time to grow; at that time he looked more like a big tock-tockie beetle than a dog.

Besides the balloon-like tummy he had stick-out bandy-legs, very like a beetle’s too, and a neck so thin that it made the head look enormous, and you wondered how the neck ever held it up. But what made him so supremely ridiculous was that he evidently did not know he was ugly; he walked about as if he was always thinking of his dignity, and he had that puffed-out and stuck-up air of importance that you only see in small people and bantam cocks who are always trying to appear an inch taller than they really are.

When the puppies were about a month old, and could feed on porridge or bread soaked in soup or gravy, they got to be too much for Jess, and she used to leave them for hours at a time and hide in the grass so as to have a little peace and sleep. Puppies are always hungry, so they soon began to hunt about for themselves, and would find scraps of meat and porridge or old bones; and if they could not get anything else, would try to eat the raw-hide nekstrops and reims. Then the fights began. As soon as one puppy saw another busy on anything, he would walk over towards him and, if strong enough, fight him for it. All day long it was nothing but wrangle, snarl, bark and yelp. Sometimes four or five

would be at it in one scrum; because as soon as one heard a row going on he would trot up hoping to steal the bone while the others were busy fighting.

It was then that I noticed other things about the odd puppy: no matter how many packed on to him, or how they bit or pulled him, he never once let out a yelp; with four or five on top of him you would see him on his back, snapping right and left with bare white teeth, gripping and worrying them when he got a good hold of anything, and all the time growling and snarling with a fierceness that was really comical. It sounded as a lion fight might sound in a toy phonograph.

Before many days passed, it was clear that some of the other puppies were inclined to leave “The Rat” alone, and that only two of them – the two biggest – seemed anxious to fight him and could take his bones away. The reason soon became apparent: instead of wasting his breath in making a noise, or wasting strength in trying to tumble the others over, “The Rat” simply bit hard and hung on; noses, ears, lips, cheeks, feet and even tails – all came handy to him; anything he could get hold of and hang on to was good enough, and the result generally was that in about half a minute the other puppy would leave everything and clear off yelling, and probably holding up one paw or hanging its head on one side to ease a chewed ear.

When either of the big puppies tackled the little fellow the fight lasted much longer. Even if he were tumbled over at once – as generally happened – and the other one stood over him barking and growling, that did not end the fight: as soon as the other chap got off him he would struggle up and begin again; he would not give in. The other puppies seemed to think there was some sort of rule like the ‘count out’ in boxing, or that once you were tumbled over you ought to give up the bone; but the odd puppy apparently did not care about rules; as far as I could see, he had just one rule: “Stick to it,” so it was not very long before even the two big fellows gave up interfering with him. The bites from his little white teeth – sharp as needles – which punctured noses and feet and tore ears, were most unpleasant. But apart from that, they found there was nothing to be gained by fighting him: they might roll him over time after time, but he came back again and worried them so persistently that it was quite impossible to enjoy the bone – they had to keep on fighting for it.

At first I drew attention to these things, but there was no encouragement from the others; they merely laughed at the attempt to make the best of a bad job. Sometimes owners of other puppies were nettled by having their beauties compared with “The Rat,” or were annoyed because he had the cheek to fight for his own and beat them. Once, when I had described how well he had stood up to Billy’s pup, Robbie caught up “The Rat,” and placing him on the table, said: “Hats off to the Duke of Wellington on the field of Waterloo.” That seemed to me the poorest sort of joke to send five grown men into fits of laughter. He stood there on the table with his head on one side, one ear standing up, and his stumpy tail twiggling – an absurd picture of friendliness, pride and confidence; yet he was so ugly and ridiculous that my heart sank, and I whisked him away. They made fun of him, and he did not mind; but it was making fun of me too, and I could not help knowing why; it was only necessary to put the puppies together to see the reason.

After that I stopped talking about him, and made the most of the good points he showed, and tried to discover more. It was the only consolation for having to take the leavings of the litter.

Then there came a day when something happened which might easily have turned out very differently, and there would have been no stories and no Jock to tell about; and the best dog in the world would never have been my friend and companion. The puppies had been behaving very badly, and had stolen several nekstrops and chewed up parts of one or two big whips; the drivers were grumbling about all the damage done and the extra work it gave them; and Ted, exasperated by the worry of it all, announced that the puppies were quite old enough to be taken away, and that those who had picked puppies must take them at once and look after them, or let some one else have them. When I heard him say that my heart gave a little thump from excitement, for I knew the day had come when the great question would be settled once and for all. Here was a glorious and unexpected chance; perhaps one of the others would not or could not take his, and I might get one of the good ones... Of

course the two big ones would be snapped up: that was certain; for, even if the men who had picked them could not take them, others; who had been promised puppies before me would exchange those they had already chosen for the better ones. Still, there were other chances; and I thought of very little else all day long, wondering if any of the good ones would be left; and if so, which?

In the afternoon Ted came up to where we were all lying in the shade and startled us with the momentous announcement:

“Billy Griffiths can’t take his pup!”

Every man of us sat up. Billy’s pup was the first pick, the champion of the litter, the biggest and strongest of the lot. Several of the others said at once that they would exchange theirs for this one; but Ted smiled and shook his head.

“No,” he said, “you had a good pick in the beginning.” Then he turned to me, and added: “You’ve only had leavings.” Some one said “The Rat,” and there was a shout of laughter, but Ted went on; “You can have Billy’s pup.”

It seemed too good to be true; not even in my wildest imaginings had I fancied myself getting the pick of the lot. I hardly waited to thank Ted before going off to look at my champion. I had seen and admired him times out of number, but it seemed as if he must look different now that he belonged to me. He was a fine big fellow, well built and strong, and looked as if he could beat all the rest put together. His legs were straight; his neck sturdy; his muzzle dark and shapely; his ears equal and well carried; and in the sunlight his yellow coat looked quite bright, with occasional glints of gold in it. He was indeed a handsome fellow.

As I put him back again with the others the odd puppy, who had stood up and sniffed at me when I came, licked my hand and twiddled his tail with the friendliest and most independent air, as if he knew me quite well and was glad to see me, and I patted the poor little chap as he waddled up. I had forgotten him in the excitement of getting Billy’s pup; but the sight of him made me think of his funny ways, his pluck and independence, and of how he had not a friend in the world except Jess and me; and I felt downright sorry for him. I picked him up and talked to him; and when his wizened little face was close to mine, he opened his mouth as if laughing, and shooting out his red tongue dabbed me right on the tip of my nose in pure friendliness. The poor little fellow looked more ludicrous than ever: he had been feeding again and was as tight as a drum; his skin was so tight one could not help thinking that if he walked over a mimosa thorn and got a scratch on the tummy he would burst like a toy balloon.

I put him back with the other puppies and returned to the tree where Ted and the rest were sitting. As I came up there was a shout of laughter, and – turning round to see what had provoked it – I found “The Rat” at my heels. He had followed me and was trotting and stumbling along, tripping every yard or so, but getting up again with head erect, ears cocked and his stumpy tail twiddling away just as pleased and proud as if he thought he had really started in life and was doing what only a ‘really and truly’ grown-up dog is supposed to do – that is, follow his master wherever he goes.

All the old chaff and jokes were fired off at me again, and I had no peace for quite a time. They all had something to say: “He won’t swap you off!”

“I’ll back ‘The Rat!’” “He is going to take care of you!”

“He is afraid you’ll get lost!” and so on; and they were still chaffing about it when I grabbed “The Rat” and took him back again.

Billy’s failure to take his puppy was so entirely unexpected and so important that the subject kept cropping up all the evening. It was very amusing then to see how each of those who had wanted to get him succeeded in finding good reasons for thinking that his own puppy was really better than Billy’s. However they differed in their estimates of each other’s dogs, they all agreed that the best judge in the world could not be certain of picking out the best dog in a good litter until the puppies were several months old; and they all gave instances in which the best looking puppy had turned out the worst dog, and others in which the one that no one would look at had grown up to be the champion.

Goodness knows how long this would have gone on if Robbie had not mischievously suggested that “perhaps ‘The Rat’ was going to beat the whole lot.” There was such a chorus of guffaws at this that no one told any more stories.

The poor little friendless Rat! It was unfortunate, but the truth is that he was uglier than before; and yet I could not help liking him. I fell asleep that night thinking of the two puppies – the best and the worst in the litter. No sooner had I gone over all the splendid points in Billy’s pup and made up my mind that he was certainly the finest I had ever seen, than the friendly wizened little face, the half-cocked ears and head on one side, the cocky little stump of a tail, and the comical dignified plucky look of the odd puppy would all come back to me. The thought of how he had licked my hand and twiddled his tail at me, and how he dabbed me on the nose, and then the manful way in which he had struggled after me through the grass, all made my heart go soft towards him, and I fell asleep not knowing what to do.

When I woke up in the morning, my first thought was of the odd puppy – how he looked to me as his only friend, and what he would feel like if, after looking on me as really belonging to him and as the one person that he was going to take care of all his life, he knew he was to be left behind or given away to any one who would take him. It would never have entered his head that he required some one to look after him; from the way he had followed me the night before it was clear he was looking after me; and the other fellows thought the same thing. His whole manner had plainly said: “Never mind old man! Don’t you worry: I am here.”

We used to make our first trek at about three o’clock in the morning, so as to be outspanned by sunrise; and walking along during that morning trek I recalled all the stories that the others had told of miserable puppies having grown into wonderful dogs, and of great men who had been very ordinary children; and at breakfast I took the plunge.

“Ted,” I said, bracing myself for the laughter, “if you don’t mind, I’ll stick to ‘The Rat.’”

If I had fired off a gun under their noses they would have been much less startled. Robbie made a grab for his plate as it slipped from his knees.

“*Don’t* do that sort of thing!” he protested indignantly. “My nerves won’t stand it!”

The others stopped eating and drinking, held their beakers of steaming coffee well out of the way to get a better look at me, and when they saw it was seriously meant there was a chorus of: “Well, I’m hanged.”

I took him in hand at once – for now he was really mine – and brought him over for his saucer of soaked bread and milk to where we sat at breakfast. Beside me there was a rough camp table – a luxury sometimes indulged in while camping or trekking with empty waggons – on which we put our tinned-milk, treacle and such things to keep them out of reach of the ants, grasshoppers, Hottentot-gods, beetles and dust. I put the puppy and his saucer in a safe place under the table out of the way of stray feet, and sank the saucer into the sand so that when he trod in it he would not spill the food; for puppies are quite stupid as they are greedy, and seem to think that they can eat faster by getting further into the dish. He appeared to be more ravenous than usual, and we were all amused by the way the little fellow craned his thin neck out further and further until he tipped up behind and his nose bumping into the saucer see-sawed him back again. He finished it all and looked round briskly at me, licking his lips and twiddling his stumpy tail.

Well, I meant to make a dog of him, so I gave him another lot. He was just like a little child – he thought he was very hungry still and could eat any amount more; but it was not possible. The lapping became slower and more laboured, with pauses every now and then to get breath or lick his lips and look about him, until at last he was fairly beaten: he could only look at it, blink and lick his chops; and, knowing that he would keep on trying, I took the saucer away. He was too full to object or to run after it; he was too full to move. He stood where he was, with his legs well spread and his little body blown out like a balloon, and finished licking the drops and crumbs off his face without moving a foot.

There was something so extraordinarily funny in the appearance and attitude of the puppy that we watched to see what he would do next. He had been standing very close to the leg of the table, but not quite touching it, when he finished feeding; and even after he had done washing his face and cleaning up generally, he stood there stock-still for several minutes, as though it was altogether too much trouble to move. One little bandy hind leg stuck out behind the table-leg, and the bulge of his little tummy stuck out in front of it; so that when at last he decided to make a move the very first little lurch brought his hip up against the table-leg. In an instant the puppy's appearance changed completely: the hair on his back and shoulders bristled; his head went up erect; one ear stood up straight and the other at half cock; and his stumpy tail quivered with rage. He evidently thought that one of the other puppies had come up behind to interfere with him. He was too proud to turn round and appear to be nervous: with head erect he glared hard straight in front of him, and, with all the little breath that he had left after his big feed, he growled ferociously in comical little gasps. He stood like that, not moving an inch, with the front foot still ready to take that step forward; and then, as nothing more happened, the hair on his back gradually went flat again; the fierceness died out of his face; and the growling stopped.

After a minute's pause, he again very slowly and carefully began to step forward; of course exactly the same thing happened again, except that this time he shook all over with rage, and the growling was fiercer and more choky. One could not imagine anything so small being in so great a rage. He took longer to cool down, too, and much longer before he made the third attempt to start. But the third time it was all over in a second. He seemed to think that this was more than any dog could stand, and that he must put a stop to it. The instant his hip touched the leg, he whipped round with a ferocious snarl – his little white teeth bared and gleaming – and bumped his nose against the table-leg.

I cannot say whether it was because of the shout of laughter from us, or because he really understood what had happened, that he looked so foolish, but he just gave one crestfallen look at me and with a feeble wag of his tail waddled off as fast as he could.

Then Ted nodded over at me, and said: "I believe you have got the champion after all!" And I was too proud to speak.

Chapter Five. Jock's Schooldays

After that day no one spoke of "The Rat" or "The Odd Puppy," or used any of the numberless nicknames that they had given him, such as "The Specimen," "The Object," "Number 6," "Bully-Beef," (because he got his head stuck in a half-pound tin one day), "The Scrap"; and even "The Duke of Wellington" ceased to be a gibe. They still laughed at his ridiculous dignity; and they loved to tease him to see him stiffen with rage and hear his choky little growls; but they liked his independence and admired his tremendous pluck. So they respected his name when he got one.

And his name was "Jock."

No one bothered about the other puppies' names: they were known as "Billy's pup," "Jimmy's pup," "Old Joe's Darling," "Yellow Jack," and "Bandy-Legged Sue"; but they seemed to think that this little chap had earned his name, fighting his way without anybody's help and with everything against him; so they gave up all the nicknames and spoke of him as "Jock."

Jock got such a good advertisement by his fight with the table-leg that every one took notice of him now and remarked about what he did; and as he was only a very young puppy, they teased him, fed him, petted him, and did their best to spoil him. He was so young that it did not seem to matter, but I think if he had not been a really good dog at heart he would have been quite spoiled.

He soon began to grow and fill out; and it was then that he taught the other puppies to leave him alone. If they had not interfered with him he might perhaps have left them alone, as it was not his nature to interfere with others; but the trouble was they had bullied him so much while he was weak and helpless that he got used to the idea of fighting for everything. It is probably the best thing that could have happened to Jock that as a puppy he was small and weak, but full of pluck; it compelled him to learn how to fight; it made him clever, cool, and careful, for he could not afford to make mistakes. When he fought he meant business; he went for a good spot, bit hard, and hung on for all he was worth; then, as the enemy began to slacken, he would start vigorously worrying and shaking. I often saw him shake himself off his feet, because the thing he was fighting was too heavy for him.

The day Jock fought the two big puppies – one after the other – for his bone, and beat them off, was the day of his independence; we all saw the tussle, and cheered the little chap. And then for one whole day he had peace; but it was like the pause at low water before the tide begins to flow the other way. He was so used to being interfered with that I suppose he did not immediately understand they would never tackle him again.

It took a whole day for him to realise this; but as soon as he did understand it he seemed to make up his mind that now his turn had come, and he went for the first puppy he saw with a bone. He walked up slowly and carefully, and began to make a circle round him. When he got about half-way round the puppy took up the bone and trotted off; but Jock headed him off at once, and again began to walk towards him very slowly and stiffly. The other puppy stood quite still for a moment, and then Jock's fierce determined look was too much for him: he dropped the bone and bolted.

There was mighty little but smell on those bones, for we gave the puppies very little meat, so when Jock had taken what he could off this one, he started on another hunt. A few yards away Billy's pup was having a glorious time, struggling with a big bone and growling all the while as if he wanted to let the world know that it was as much as any one's life was worth to come near him. None of us thought Jock would tackle him, as Billy's pup was still a long way the biggest and strongest of the puppies, and always ready to bully the others.

Jock was about three or four yards away when he caught sight of Billy's pup, and for about a minute he stood still and quietly watched. At first he seemed surprised, and then interested, and then gradually he stiffened up all over in that funny way of his; and when the hair on his shoulders was all

on end and his ears and tail were properly up, he moved forward very deliberately. In this fashion he made a circle round Billy's pup, keeping about two feet away from him, walking infinitely slowly and glaring steadily at the enemy out of the corners of his eyes; and while he was doing this, the other fellow was tearing away at his bone, growling furiously and glaring sideways at Jock. When the circle was finished they stood once more face to face; and then after a short pause Jock began to move in closer, but more slowly even than before.

Billy's pup did not like this: it was beginning to look serious. He could not keep on eating and at the same time watch Jock; moreover, there was such a very unpleasant wicked look about Jock, and he moved so steadily and silently forward, that any one would feel a bit creepy and nervous; so he put his paw on the bone and let out a string of snarly barks, with his ears flat on his neck and his tail rather low down. But Jock still came on – a little more carefully and slowly perhaps, but just as steadily as ever. When about a foot off the enemy's nose he changed his direction slightly, as if to walk past, and Billy's pup turned his head to watch him, keeping his nose pointed towards Jock's, but when they got side by side he again looked straight in front of him.

Perhaps he did this to make sure the bone was still there, or perhaps to show his contempt when he thought Jock was going off. Whatever the reason was, it was a mistake; for, as he turned his head away, Jock flew at him, got a good mouthful of ear, and in no time they were rolling and struggling in the dust – Jock's little grunts barely-audible in the noise made by the other one. Billy's pup was big and strong, and he was not a coward; but Jock was worrying his ear vigorously, and he could not find anything to bite in return. In less than a minute he began to howl, and was making frantic efforts to get away. Then Jock let go the ear and tackled the bone.

After that he had no more puppy fights. As soon as any one of the others saw Jock begin to walk slowly and carefully towards him he seemed to suddenly get tired of his bone, and moved off.

Most dogs – like most people – when their hearts fail them will try to hide the truth from one another and make some sort of effort or pretence to keep their dignity or self-respect or the good opinion of others. You may see it all any day in the street, when dogs meet and stop to 'size' each other up. As a rule the perfectly shameless cowards are found in the two extreme classes – the outcasts, whose spirits are broken by all the world being against them; and the pampered darlings, who have never had to do anything for themselves. Many dogs who are clearly anxious to get out of fighting will make a pretence of bravery at the time, or at least cover up their cowardice, with a 'wait-till-I-catch-you-next-time' air, as soon as they are at a safe distance. Day after day at the outspans the puppies went through every stage of the business, to our constant amusement and to my unconcealed pride; for Jock was thenceforth cock of the walk. If they saw him some distance off moving towards them or even staring hard and with his ears and tail up, the retreat would be made with a gloomy and dignified air, sometimes even with growls just loud enough to please themselves without provoking him; if he was fairly close up when spotted they wasted no time in putting on airs, but trotted off promptly; but sometimes they would be too busy to notice anything until a growl or a rustle in the grass close behind gave warning; and it was always followed by a jump and a shameless scuttle, very often accompanied by a strangled sort of yowling yelp, just as if he had already got them by the ear or throat.

Some of them became so nervous that we could not resist playing practical jokes on them – making sudden strange noises, imitating Jock's growls, tossing bits of bark at them or touching them from behind with a stick while they were completely occupied with their bones – for the fun of seeing the stampede and hearing the sudden howls of surprise and fright.

One by one the other puppies were taken away by their new masters, and before Jock was three months old he and Jess were the only dogs with the waggons. Then he went to school, and like all schoolboys learnt some things very quickly – the things that he liked; and some things he learnt very slowly, and hated them just as a boy hates extra work in play-time. When I poked about with a stick in the banks of dongas to turn out mice and field-rats for him, or when I hid a partridge or a hare and made him find it, he was as happy as could be; but when I made him lie down and watch my

gun or coat while I pretended to go off and leave him, he did not like it; and as for his lessons in manners! well, he simply hated them.

There are some things which a dog in that sort of life simply must learn or you cannot keep him; and the first of these is, not to steal. Every puppy will help himself until he is taught not to; and your dog lives with you and can get at everything. At the outspans the grub-box is put on the ground, open for each man to help himself; if you make a stew, or roast the leg of a buck, the big three-legged pot is put down handy and left there; if you are lucky enough to have some tinned butter or condensed milk, the tins are opened and stood on the ground; and if you have a dog thief in the camp, nothing is safe.

There was a dog with us once – a year or two later – who was the worst thief I ever knew. He was a one-eyed pointer with feet like a duck's, and his name was Snarleyow. He looked the most foolish and most innocent dog in the world, and was so timid that if you stumbled as you passed him he would instantly start howling and run for the horizon. The first bad experience I had of Snarley was on one of the little hunting trips which we sometimes made in those days, away from the waggons. We travelled light on those occasions, and, except for some tea and a very little flour and salt, took no food; we lived on what we shot and of course kept 'hunter's pot.'

'Hunter's pot' is a perpetual stew; you make one stew, and keep it going as long as necessary, maintaining a full pot by adding to it as fast as you take any out; scraps of everything go in; any kind of meat – buck, bird, pig, hare – and if you have such luxuries as onions or potatoes, so much the better; then, to make the soup strong, the big bones are added – the old ones being fished out every day and replaced by a fresh lot. When allowed to cool it sets like brawn, and a hungry hunter wants nothing better.

We had had a good feed the first night of this trip and had then filled the pot up leaving it to simmer as long as the fire lasted, expecting to have cold pie set in jelly – but without the pie-crust – for early breakfast next morning before going off for the day; but, to our amazement, in the morning the pot was empty. There were some strange kaffirs – camp followers – hanging on to our trail for what they could pick up, and we suspected them. There was a great row, but the boys denied having touched the pot, and we could prove nothing.

That night we made the fire close to our sleeping-place and moved the kaffirs further away, but next morning the pot was again empty – cleaned and polished as if it had been washed out. While we, speechless with astonishment and anger, were wondering who the thief was and what we should do with him, one of the hunting boys came up and pointed to the prints of a dog's feet in the soft white ashes of the dead fire. There was only one word: "Snarleyow." The thief was lying fast asleep comfortably curled up on his master's clothes. There could be no mistake about those big splayed footprints, and in about two minutes Snarleyow was getting a first-class hammering, with his head tied inside the three-legged pot for a lesson.

After that he was kept tied up at night; but Snarleyow was past curing. We had practically nothing to eat but what we shot, and nothing to drink but bush tea – that is, tea made from a certain wild shrub with a very strong scent; it is not nice, but you drink it when you cannot get anything else. We could not afford luxuries then, but two days before Ted's birthday he sent a runner off to Komati Drift and bought a small tin of ground coffee and a tin of condensed milk for his birthday treat. It was to be a real feast that day, so he cut the top off the tin instead of punching two holes and blowing the milk out, as we usually did in order to economise and keep out the dust and insects. What we could not use in the coffee that day we were going to spread on our 'dough-boys' instead of butter and jam. It was to be a real feast!

The five of us sat down in a circle and began on our hunter's pot, saving the good things for the last. While we were still busy on the stew, there came a pathetic heartbreaking yowl from Snarleyow, and we looked round just in time to see him, his tail tucked between his legs and his head high in the air, bolting off into the bush as hard as he could lay legs to the ground, with the milk tin stuck firmly on to his nose. The greedy thief in trying to get the last scrap out had dug his nose and top jaw too

far in, and the jagged edges of the tin had gripped him; and the last we saw of our birthday treat was the tin flashing in the sunlight on Snarley's nose as he tore away howling into the bush. Snarleyow came to a bad end: his master shot him as he was running off with a ham. He was a full-grown dog when he came to our camp, and too old to learn principles and good manners.

Dogs are like people: what they learn when they are young, whether of good or of evil, is not readily forgotten. I began early with Jock, and – remembering what Rocky had said – tried to help him. It is little use punishing a dog for stealing if you take no trouble about feeding him. That is very rough on the dog; he has to find out slowly and by himself what he may take, and what he may not. Sometimes he leaves what he was meant to take, and goes hungry; and sometimes takes what was not intended for him, and gets a thrashing. That is not fair. You cannot expect to have a good dog, and one that will understand you, if you treat him in that way. Some men teach their dogs not to take food from any one but themselves. One day when we were talking about training dogs, Ted told one of the others to open Jess's mouth and put a piece of meat in it, he undertaking not to say a word and not even to look at her. The meat was put in her mouth and her jaws were shut tight on it; but the instant she was free she dropped it, walked round to the other side of Ted and sat close up to him. He waited for a minute or so and, without so much as a glance at her, said quietly "All right." She was back again in a second and with one hungry bite bolted the lump of meat.

I taught Jock not to touch food in camp until he was told to 'take it.' The lesson began when he got his saucer of porridge in the morning; and he must have thought it cruel to have that put in front of him, and then to be held back or tapped with a finger on the nose each time he tried to dive into it. At first he struggled and fought to get at it; then he tried to back away and dodge round the other side; then he became dazed, and, thinking it was not for him at all, wanted to walk off and have nothing more to do with it. In a few days, however, I got him to lie still and take it only when I patted him and pushed him towards it; and in a very little time he got on so well that I could put his food down without saying anything and let him wait for permission. He would lie down with his head on his paws and his nose right up against the saucer, so as to lose no time when the order came; but he would not touch it until he heard 'Take it.' He never moved his head, but his little brown dark eyes, full of childlike eagerness, used to be turned up sideways and fixed on mine. I believe he watched my lips; he was so quick to obey the order when it came.

When he grew up and had learned his lessons there was no need for these exercises. He got to understand me so well that if I nodded or moved my hand in a way that meant 'all right,' he would go ahead: by that time too he was dignified and patient; and it was only in his puppyhood that he used to crouch up close to his food and tremble with impatience and excitement.

There was one lesson that he hated most of all. I used to balance a piece of meat on his nose and make him keep it there until the word to take it came.

Time after time he would close his eyes as if the sight of the meat was more than he could bear, and his mouth would water so from the savoury smell that long streams of dribble would hang down on either side.

It seems unnecessary and even cruel to tantalise a dog in that way; but it was not: it was education; and it was true kindness. It taught him to understand his master, and to be obedient, patient, and observant; it taught him not to steal; it saved him from much sickness, and perhaps death, by teaching him not to feed on anything he could find; it taught him manners and made it possible for him to live with his master and be treated like a friend.

Good feeding, good care, and plenty of exercise soon began to make a great change in Jock. He ceased to look like a beetle – grew bigger everywhere, not only in one part as he had done at first; his neck grew thick and strong, and his legs straightened up and filled out with muscle. The others, seeing him every day, were slow to notice these things, but my sand had been changed into gold long ago, and they always said I could not see anything wrong in Jock.

There was one other change which came more slowly and seemed to me much more wonderful. After his morning feed, if there was nothing to do, he used to go to sleep in some shady place, and I remember well one day watching him as he lay. His bit of shade had moved away and left him in the bright sunshine; and as he breathed and his ribs rose and fell, the tips of the hairs on his side and back caught the sunlight and shone like polished gold, and the wavy dark lines seemed more distinct and darker, but still very soft. In fact, I was astonished to see that in a certain light Jock looked quite handsome. That was the first time I noticed the change in colour; and it made me remember two things. The first was what the other fellows had said the day Billy gave up his pup, “You can’t tell how a puppy will turn out: even his colour changes;” and the second was a remark made by an old hunter who had offered to buy Jock – the real meaning of which I did not understand at the time.

“The best dog I ever owned was a golden brindle,” said the old man thoughtfully, after I had laughed at the idea of selling my dog. I had got so used to thinking that he was only a faded wishy-washy edition of Jess that the idea of his colour changing did not occur to me then, and I never suspected that the old man could see how he would turn out; but the touch of sunlight opened my eyes that day, and after that whenever I looked at Jock the words “golden brindle” came back to my mind, and I pictured him as he was going to be – and as he really did grow up – having a coat like burnished gold with soft, dark, wavy brindles in it and that snow-white V on his chest.

Jock had many things to learn besides the lessons he got from me – the lessons of experience which nobody could teach him. When he was six months old – just old enough, if he had lived in a town, to chase a cat and make a noise – he knew many things that respectable puppies of twice his age who stay at home never get a chance of learning.

On trek there were always new places to see, new roads to travel, and new things to examine, tackle or avoid. He learnt something fresh almost every day: he learnt, for instance, that, although it was shady and cool under the waggon, it was not good enough to lie in the wheel track, not even for the pleasure of feeling the cool iron tyre against your back or head as you slept; and he knew that, because one day he had done it and the wheel had gone over his foot; and it might just as easily have been his back or head. Fortunately the sand was soft and his foot was not crushed; but he was very lame for some days, and had to travel on the waggon.

He learned a good deal from Jess: among other things, that it was not necessary to poke his nose up against a snake in order to find out what it was. He knew that Jess would fight anything; and when one day he saw her back hair go up and watched her sheer off the footpath wide into the grass, he did the same; and then when we had shot the snake, both he and Jess came up very very cautiously and sniffed at it, with every hair on their bodies standing up.

He found out for himself that it was not a good idea to turn a scorpion over with his paw. The vicious little tail with a thorn in it whipped over the scorpion’s back, and Jock had such a foot that he must have thought a scorpion worse than two waggons. He was a very sick dog for some days; but after that, whenever he saw a thing that he did not understand, he would watch it very carefully from a little way off and notice what it did and what it looked like, before trying experiments.

So, little by little, Jock got to understand plenty of things that no town dog would ever know, and he got to know – just as some people do – by what we call instinct, whether a thing was dangerous or safe, even though he had never seen anything like it before. That is how he knew that wolves or lions were about – and that they were dangerous – when he heard or scented them; although he had never seen, scented or heard one before to know what sort of animal it might be. You may well wonder how he could tell whether the scent or the cry belonged to a wolf which he must avoid, or to a buck which he might hunt, when he had never seen either a wolf or a buck at the time; but he did know; and he also knew that no dog could safely go outside the ring of the camp fires when wolf or lion was about. I have known many town-bred dogs that could scent them just as well as Jess or Jock could, but having no instinct of danger they went out to see what it was, and of course they never came back.

I used to take Jock with me everywhere so that he could learn everything that a hunting dog ought to know, and above all things to learn that he was my dog, and to understand all that I wanted to tell him. So while he was still a puppy, whenever he stopped to sniff at something new or to look at something strange, I would show him what it was; but if he stayed behind to explore while I moved on, or if he fell asleep and did not hear me get up from where I had sat down to rest, or went off the track on his own account, I used to hide away from him on top of a rock or up a tree and let him hunt about until he found me.

At first he used to be quite excited when he missed me, but after a little time he got to know what to do and would sniff along the ground and canter away after me – always finding me quite easily. Even if I climbed a tree to hide from him he would follow my track to the foot of the tree, sniff up the trunk as far as he could reach standing up against it, and then peer up into the branches. If he could not see me from one place, he would try another – always with his head tilted a bit on one side. He never barked at these times; but as soon as he saw me, his ears would drop, his mouth open wide with the red tongue lolling out, and the stump of a tail would twiggle away to show how pleased he was. Sometimes he would give a few little whimpery grunts: he hardly ever barked; when he did I knew there was something worth looking at.

Jock was not a quarrelsome dog, and he was quick to learn and very obedient, but in one connection I had great difficulty with him for quite a little time. He had a sort of private war with the fowls; and it was due to the same cause as his war with the other puppies: they interfered with him. Now, every one knows what a fowl is like: it is impudent, inquisitive, selfish, always looking for something to eat, and has no principles.

A friend of mine once told me a story about a dog of his and the trouble he had with fowls. Several of us had been discussing the characters of dogs, and the different emotions they feel and manage to express, and the kind of things they seem to think about. Every one knows that a dog can feel angry, frightened, pleased, and disappointed. Any one who knows dogs will tell you that they can also feel anxious, hopeful, nervous, inquisitive, surprised, ashamed, interested, sad, loving, jealous, and contented – just like human beings.

We had told many stories illustrating this, when my friend asked the question: “Have dogs a sense of humour?” Now I know that Jock looked very foolish the day he fought the table-leg – and a silly old hen made him look just as foolish another day – but that is not quite what my friend meant. On both occasions Jock clearly felt that he had made himself look ridiculous; but he was very far from looking amused. The question was: Is a dog capable of sufficient thinking to appreciate a simple joke, and is it possible for a dog to feel amused. If Jess had seen Jock bursting to fight the table-leg would she have seen the joke? Well, I certainly did not think so; but he said he was quite certain some dogs have a sense of humour; and he had had proof of it.

He told the story very gravely, but I really do not even now know whether he – Well, here it is: He had once owned a savage old watch-dog, whose box stood in the back-yard where he was kept chained up all day; he used to be fed once a day – in the mornings – and the great plague of his life was the fowls. They ran loose in the yard and picked up food all day, besides getting a really good feed of grain morning and evening; possibly the knowledge of this made the old dog particularly angry when they would come round by ones or twos or dozens trying to steal part of his one meal. Anyhow, he hated them, and whenever he got a chance killed them. The old fowls learned to keep out of his way and never ventured within his reach unless they were quite sure that he was asleep or lying in his kennel where he could not see them; but there were always new fowls coming, or young ones growing up; and so the war went on.

One Sunday morning my friend was enjoying a smoke on his back stoep when feeding time came round. The cook took the old dog’s food to him in a high three-legged pot, and my friend, seeing the fowls begin to gather round and wishing to let the old dog have his meal in peace, told the

cook to give the fowls a good feed in another part of the yard to draw them off. So the old fellow polished off his food and licked the pot clean, leaving not a drop or a speck behind.

But fowls are very greedy; they were soon back again wandering about, with their active-looking eyes searching everything. The old dog, feeling pretty satisfied with life, picked out a sandy spot in the sunshine, threw himself down full stretch on his side, and promptly went to sleep – at peace with all the world. Immediately he did this, out stepped a long-legged athletic-looking young cockerel and began to advance against the enemy. As he got nearer he slowed down, and looked first with one eye and then with the other so as to make sure that all was safe, and several times he paused with one foot poised high before deciding to take the next step. My friend was greatly amused to see all the trouble that the fowl was taking to get up to the empty pot, and, for the fun of giving the conceited young cockerel a fright, threw a pebble at him. He was so nervous that when the pebble dropped near him, he gave one great bound and tore off flapping and screaming down the yard as if he thought the old dog was after him. The old fellow himself was startled out of his sleep, and raised his head to see what the row was about; but, as nothing more happened, he lay down again, and the cockerel, finding also that it was a false alarm, turned back not a bit ashamed for another try.

The cockerel had not seen the old dog lift his head; my friend had, and when he looked again he saw that, although the underneath eye – half buried in the sand – was shut, the top eye was open and was steadily watching the cockerel as he came nearer and nearer to the pot. My friend sat dead still, expecting a rush and another fluttering scramble. At last the cockerel took the final step, craned his neck to its utmost and peered down into the empty pot. The old dog gave two gentle pats with his tail in the sand, and closing his eye went to sleep again.

Jock had the same sort of trouble. The fowls tried to steal his food; and he would not stand it. His way of dealing with them was not good for their health: before I could teach him not to kill, and before the fowls would learn not to steal, he had finished half a dozen of them one after another with just one bite and a shake. He would growl very low as they came up and, without lifting his head from the plate, watch them with his little eyes turning from soft brown to shiny black; and when they came too near and tried to snatch just one mouthful – well, one jump, one shake, and it was all over.

In the end he learned to tumble them over and scare their wits out without hurting them; and they learned to give him a very wide berth.

I used always to keep some fowls with the waggons, partly to have fresh meat if we ran out of game, but mainly to have fresh eggs, which were a very great treat; and as a rule it was only when a hen turned obstinate and would not lay that we ate her. I used to have one old rooster, whose name was Pezulu, and six or eight hens. The hens changed from time to time – as we ate them – but Pezulu remained.

The fowl-coop was carried on top of everything else, and it was always left open so that the fowls could go in and out as they liked. In the very beginning of all, of course, the fowls were shut in and fed in the coop for a day or two to teach them where their home was; but it is surprising how quickly a fowl will learn and how it observes things. For instance, the moving of the coop from one waggon to another is not a thing one would expect the fowls to notice, all the waggons being so much alike and having no regular order at the outspans; but they did notice it, and at once. They would first get on to the waggon on which the coop had been, and look about in a puzzled lost kind of way; then walk all over the load apparently searching for it, with heads cocked this way and that, as if a great big coop was a thing that might have been mislaid somewhere; then one after another would jerk out short cackles of protest, indignation and astonishment, and generally make no end of a fuss. It was only when old Pezulu led the way and perched on the coop itself and crowed and called to them that they would get up on to the other waggon.

Pezulu got his name by accident – in fact, by a misunderstanding. It is a Zulu word meaning ‘up’ or ‘on top,’ and when the fowls first joined the waggons and were allowed to wander about at the outspan places, the boys would drive them up when it was time to trek again by cracking their big

whips and shouting “Pezulu.” In a few days no driving or whip-cracking was necessary; one of the boys would shout “Pezulu” three or four times, and they would all come in and one by one fly and scramble up to the coop. One day, after we had got a new lot of hens, a stranger happened to witness the performance. Old Pezulu was the only one who knew what was meant, and being a terribly fussy nervous old gentleman, came tearing out of the bush making a lot of noise, and scrambled hastily on to the waggon. The stranger, hearing the boys call “Pezulu” and seeing him hurry up so promptly, remarked: “How well he knows his name!” So we called him Pezulu after that.

Whenever we got new fowls Pezulu became as distracted as a nervous man with a large family trying to find seats in an excursion train. As soon as he saw the oxen being brought up, and before any one had called for the fowls, he would begin fussing and fuming – trying all sorts of dodges to get the hens up to the waggons. He would crow and cluck-cluck or kip-kip; he would go a few yards towards the waggons and scratch in the ground, pretending to have found something good, and invite them to come and share it; he would get on the disselboom and crow and flap his wings loudly; and finally he would mount on top of the coop and make all sorts of signals to the hens, who took not the least notice of him. As the inspanning went on he would get more and more excited; down he would come again – not flying off, but hopping from ledge to ledge to show them the easy way; and once more on the ground he would scrape and pick and cluck to attract them, and the whole game would be played over again and again. So even with new fowls we had very little trouble, as old Pezulu did most of the teaching.

But sometimes Pezulu himself was caught napping – to the high delight of the boys. He was so nervous and so fussy that they thought it great fun to play tricks on him and pretend to go off and leave him behind. It was not easy to do this because, as I say, he did not wait to be called, but got ready the minute he saw the oxen coming up. He was like those fussy people who drive every one else crazy and waste a lot of time by always being half an hour early, and then annoy you by boasting that they have never missed a train in their lives.

But there was one way in which Pezulu used to get caught. Just as he knew that inspanning meant starting, so, too, he knew that outspanning meant stopping; and whenever the waggons stopped – even for a few minutes – out would pop his head, just like the fussy red-faced father of the big family looking out to see if it was their station or an accident on the line. Right and left he would look, giving excited inquisitive clucks from time to time, and if they did not start in another minute or two, he would get right out and walk anxiously to the edge of the load and have another good look around – as the nervous old gentleman gets half out, and then right out, to look for the guard, but will not let go the handle of the door for fear of being left. Unless he saw the boys outspanning he would not get off, and if one of the hens ventured out he would rush back at her in a great state and try to bustle her back into the coop. But often it happens while trekking that something goes wrong with the gear – a yokeskey or a nek-strop breaks, or an ox will not pull kindly or pulls too hard where he is, and you want to change his place; and in that way it comes about that sometimes you have to outspan one or two or even more oxen in the middle of a trek.

That is how Pezulu used to get caught: the minute he saw outspanning begin, he would nip off with all the hens following him and wander about looking for food, chasing locusts or grasshoppers, and making darts at beetles and all sorts of dainties – very much interested in his job and wandering further from the waggons at every step. The boys would watch him, and as soon as they were fixed up again, would start off without a word of warning to Pezulu. Then there was a scene. At the first sound of the waggon-wheels moving he would look up from where he was or walk briskly into the open or get on to an ant-heap to see what was up, and when to his horror he saw the waggon actually going without him, he simply screamed open-mouthed and tore along with wings outstretched – the old gentleman shouting “Stop the train, stop the train,” with his family straggling along behind him. It never took him long to catch up and scramble on, but even then he was not a bit less excited: he was perfectly hysterical, and his big red comb seemed to get quite purple as if he might be going to

have apoplexy, and he twitched and jerked about so that it flapped first over one eye and then over the other. This was the boys' practical joke which they played on him whenever they could.

That was old Pezulu – Pezulu the First. He was thick in the body, all chest and tail, short in the legs, and had enormous spurs; and his big comb made him; look so red in the face that one could not help thinking he was too fond of his dinner. In some old Christmas number we came across a coloured caricature of a militia colonel in full uniform, and for quite a long time it remained tacked on to the coop with “Pezulu” written on it.

Pezulu the Great – who was Pezulu the Second – was not like that: he was a game cock, all muscle and no frills, with a very resolute manner and a real love of his profession; he was a bit like Jock in some things; and that is why I fancy perhaps Jock and he were friends in a kind of way. But Jock could not get on with the others: they were constantly changing; new ones who had to be taught manners were always coming; so he just lumped them together, and hated fowls. He taught them manners, but they taught him something too – at any rate, one of them did; and one of the biggest surprises and best lessons Jock ever had was given him by a hen while he was still a growing-up puppy.

He was beginning to fancy that he knew a good deal, and like most young dogs was very inquisitive and wanted to know everything and at once. At that time he was very keen on hunting mice, rats and bush squirrels, and had even fought and killed a meerkat after the plucky little rikkitikki had bitten him rather badly through the lip; and he was still much inclined to poke his nose in or rush on to things instead of sniffing round about first.

However, he learned to be careful, and an old hen helped to teach him. The hens usually laid their eggs in the coop because it was their home, but sometimes they would make nests in the bush at the outspan places. One of the hens had done this, and the bush she had chosen was very low and dense. No one saw the hen make the nest and no one saw her sitting on it, for the sunshine was so bright everywhere else, and the shade of the bush so dark that it was impossible to see anything there; but while we were at breakfast Jock, who was bustling about everywhere as a puppy will, must have scented the hen or have seen this brown thing in the dark shady hole.

The hen was sitting with her head sunk right down into her chest, so that he could not see any head, eyes or beak – just a sort of brown lump. Suddenly we saw Jock stand stock-still, cock up one ear, put his head down and his nose out, hump up his shoulders a bit and begin to walk very slowly forward in a crouching attitude. He lifted his feet so slowly and so softly that you could count five between each step. We were all greatly amused and thought he was pointing a mouse or a locust, and we watched him.

He crept up like a boy showing off until he was only six inches from the object, giving occasional cautious glances back at us to attract attention. Just as he got to the hole the hen let out a vicious peck on the top of his nose and at the same time flapped over his head, screaming and cackling for dear life. It was all so sudden and so surprising that she was gone before he could think of making a grab at her; and when he heard our shouts of laughter he looked as foolish as if he understood all about it.

Chapter Six. The First Hunt

Jock's first experience in hunting was on the Crocodile River not far from the spot where afterwards we had the great fight with The Old Crocodile. In the summer when the heavy rains flood the country the river runs 'bank high,' hiding everything – reeds, rocks, islands, and stunted trees – in some places silent and oily like a huge gorged snake, in others foaming and turbulent as an angry monster. In the rainless winter when the water is low and clear the scene is not so grand, but is quiet, peaceful, and much more beautiful. There is an infinite variety in it then – the river sometimes winding along in one deep channel, but more often forking out into two or three streams in the broad bed. The loops and lacings of the divided water carve out islands and spaces of all shapes and sizes, banks of clean white sand or of firm damp mud swirled up by the floods, on which tall green reeds with yellow tasselled tops shoot up like crops of Kaffir corn. Looked down upon from the flood banks the silver streaks of water gleam brightly in the sun, and the graceful reeds, bowing and swaying slowly with the gentlest breeze and alternately showing their leaf-sheathed stems and crested tops, give the appearance of an ever-changing sea of green and gold. Here and there a big rock, black and polished, stands boldly out, and the sea of reeds laps round it like the waters of a lake on a bright still day. When there is no breeze the rustle of the reeds is hushed, and the only constant sound is the ever-varying voice of the water, lapping, gurgling, chattering, murmuring, as it works its way along the rocky channels; sometimes near and loud, sometimes faint and distant; and sometimes, over long sandy reaches, there is no sound at all.

Get up on some vantage point upon the high bank and look down there one day in the winter of the tropics as the heat and hush of noon approach, and it will seem indeed a scene of peace and beauty – a place to rest and dream, where there is neither stir nor sound. Then, as you sit silently watching and thinking, where all the world is so infinitely still, you will notice that one reed down among all those countless thousands is moving. It bows slowly and gracefully a certain distance, and then with a quivering shuddering motion straightens itself still more slowly and with evident difficulty, until at last it stands upright again like the rest but still all a-quiver while they do not move a leaf. Just as you are beginning to wonder what the reason is, the reed bows slowly again, and again struggles back; and so it goes on as regularly as the swing of a pendulum. Then you know that, down at the roots where you cannot see it, the water is flowing silently, and that something attached to this reed is dragging in the stream and pulling it over, and swinging back to do it again each time the reed lifts it free – a perpetual seesaw.

You are glad to find the reason, because it looked a little uncanny; but the behaviour of that one reed has stopped your dreaming and made you look about more carefully. Then you find that, although the reeds appear as still as the rocks, there is hardly a spot where, if you watch for a few minutes, you will not see something moving. A tiny field-mouse climbing one reed will sway it over; a river rat gnawing at the roots will make it shiver and rustle; little birds hopping from one to another will puzzle you; and a lagavaan turning in his sunbath will make half a dozen sway outwards.

All feeling that it is a home of peace, a place to rest and dream, leaves you; you are wondering what goes on down below the green and gold where you can see nothing; and when your eye catches a bigger, slower, continuous movement in another place, and for twenty yards from the bank to the stream you see the tops of the reeds silently and gently parting and closing again as something down below works its way along without the faintest sound, the place seems too quiet, too uncanny and mysterious, too silent, stealthy and treacherous for you to sit still in comfort: you must get up and do something.

There is always good shooting along the rivers in a country where water is scarce. Partridges, bush-pheasants and stembuck were plentiful along the banks and among the thorns, but the reeds themselves were the home of thousands of guinea-fowl, and you could also count on duiker and rietbuck as almost a certainty there. If this were all, it would be like shooting in a well-stocked cover, but it is not only man that is on the watch for game at the drinking-places. The beasts of prey – lions, tigers, hyenas, wild dogs and jackals, and lastly pythons and crocodiles – know that the game must come to water, and they lie in wait near the tracks or the drinking-places. That is what makes the mystery and charm of the reeds; you never know what you will put up. The lions and tigers had deserted the country near the main drifts and followed the big game into more peaceful parts; but the reeds were still the favourite shelter and resting-place of the crocodiles; and there were any number of them left.

There is nothing that one comes across in hunting more horrible and loathsome than the crocodile: nothing that rouses the feeling of horror and hatred as it does: nothing that so surely and quickly gives the sensation of ‘creeps in the back’ as the noiseless apparition of one in the water just where you least expected anything, or the discovery of one silently and intently watching you with its head resting flat on a sand spit – the thing you had seen half a dozen times before and mistaken for a small rock. Many things are hunted in the Bushveld; but only the crocodile is hated. There is always the feeling of horror that this hideous, cowardly, cruel thing – the enemy of man and beast alike – with its look of a cunning smile in the greeny glassy eyes and great wide mouth, will mercilessly drag you down – down – down to the bottom of some deep still pool, and hold you there till you drown. Utterly helpless yourself to escape or fight, you cannot even call, and if you could, no one could help you there. It is all done in silence: a few bubbles come up where a man went down; and that is the end of it.

We all knew about the crocodiles and were prepared for them, but the sport was good, and when you are fresh at the game and get interested in a hunt it is not very easy to remember all the things you have been warned about and the precautions you were told to take. It was on the first day at the river that one of our party, who was not a very old hand at hunting, came in wet and muddy and told us how a crocodile had scared the wits out of him. He had gone out after guinea-fowl, he said, but as he had no dog to send in and flush them, the birds simply played with him: they would not rise but kept running in the reeds a little way in front of him, just out of sight. He could hear them quite distinctly, and thinking to steal a march on them took off his boots and got on to the rocks. Stepping bare-footed from rock to rock where the reeds were thin, he made no noise at all and got so close up that he could hear the little whispered chink-chink-chink that they give when near danger. The only chance of getting a shot at them was to mount one of the big rocks from which he could see down into the reeds; and he worked his way along a mud-bank towards one. A couple more steps from the mud-bank on to a low black rock would take him to the big one. Without taking his eyes off the reeds where the guinea-fowl were he stepped cautiously on to the low black rock, and in an instant was swept off his feet, tossed and tumbled over and over, into the mud and reeds, and there was a noise of furious rushing and crashing as if a troop of elephants were stampeding through the reeds. He had stepped on the back of a sleeping crocodile; no doubt it was every bit as frightened as he was. There was much laughter over this and the breathless earnestness with which he told the story; but there was also a good deal of chaff, for it seems to be generally accepted that you are not bound to believe all hunting stories; and Jim and his circus crocodile became the joke of the camp.

We were spending a couple of days on the river bank to make the most of the good water and grazing, and all through the day some one or other would be out pottering about among the reeds, gun in hand, to keep the pot full and have some fun, and although we laughed and chaffed about Jim’s experience, I fancy we were all very much on the look-out for rocks that looked like crocs and crocs that looked like rocks.

One of the most difficult lessons that a beginner has to learn is to keep cool. The keener you are the more likely you are to get excited and the more bitterly you feel the disappointments; and

once you lose your head, there is no mistake too stupid for you to make, and the result is another good chance spoilt. The great silent bush is so lonely; the strain of being on the look-out all the time is so great; the uncertainty as to what may start up – anything from a partridge to a lion – is so trying that the beginner is wound up like an alarm clock and goes off at the first touch. He is not fit to hit a haystack at twenty yards; will fire without looking or aiming at all; jerk the rifle as he fires; forget to change the sight after the last shot; forget to cock his gun or move the safety catch; forget to load; forget to fire at all: nothing is impossible – nothing too silly.

On a later trip we had with us a man who was out for the first time, and when we came upon a troop of koodoo he started yelling, war-whooping and swearing at them, chasing them on foot and waving his rifle over his head. When we asked him why he, who was nearest to them, had not fired a shot, all he could say was that he never remembered his rifle or anything else until they were gone.

These experiences had been mine, some of them many times, in spite of Rocky's example and advice; and they were always followed by a fresh stock of good resolutions.

I had started out this day with the same old determination to keep cool, but, once into the reeds, Jim's account of how he had stepped on the crocodile put all other thoughts out of my mind, and most of my attention was given to examining suspicious-looking rocks as we stole silently and quietly along.

Jock was with me, as usual; I always took him out even then – not for hunting, because he was too young, but in order to train him. He was still only a puppy, about six months old, as well as I remember, and had never tackled or even followed a wounded buck, so that it was impossible to say what he would do; he had seen me shoot a couple and had wanted to worry them as they fell; but that was all. He was quite obedient and kept his place behind me; and, although he trembled with excitement when he saw or heard anything, he never rushed in or moved ahead of me without permission. The guinea-fowl tormented him that day; he could scent and hear them, and was constantly making little runs forward, half crouching and with his nose back and tail dead level and his one ear full-cocked and the other half-up.

For about half an hour we went on in this way. There was plenty of fresh duiker spoor to show us that we were in a likely place, one spoor in particular being so fresh in the mud that it seemed only a few minutes old. We were following this one very eagerly but very cautiously, and evidently Jock agreed with me that the duiker must be near, for he took no more notice of the guinea-fowl; and I for my part forgot all about crocodiles and suspicious-looking rocks; there was at that moment only one thing in the world for me, and that was the duiker. We crept along noiselessly in and out of the reeds, round rocks and mudholes, across small stretches of firm mud or soft sand, so silently that nothing could have heard us, and finally we came to a very big rock, with the duiker spoor fresher than ever going close round it down stream. The rock was a long sloping one, polished smooth by the floods and very slippery to walk on. I climbed it in dead silence, peering down into the reeds and expecting every moment to see the duiker.

The slope up which we crept was long and easy, but that on the down-stream side was much steeper. I crawled up to the top on hands and knees, and raising myself slowly, looked carefully about, but no duiker could be seen; yet Jock was sniffing and trembling more than ever, and it was quite clear that he thought we were very close up. Seeing nothing in front or on either side, I stood right up and turned to look back the way we had come and examine the reeds on that side. In doing so a few grains of grit crunched under my foot, and instantly there was a rush in the reeds behind me; I jumped round to face it, believing that the crocodile was grabbing at me from behind, and on the polished surface of the rock my feet slipped and shot from under me, both bare elbows bumped hard on the rock, jerking the rifle out of my hands; and I was launched like a torpedo right into the mass of swaying reeds.

When you think you are tumbling on to a crocodile there is only one thing you want to do – get out as soon as possible. How long it took to reach the top of the rock again, goodness only knows! It seemed like a life-time; but the fact is I was out of those reeds and up that rock in time to see

the duiker as it broke out of the reeds, raced up the bank, and disappeared into the bush with Jock tearing after it as hard as ever he could go.

One call stopped him, and he came back to me looking very crestfallen and guilty, no doubt thinking that he had behaved badly and disgraced himself. But he was not to blame at all; he had known all along that the duiker was there – having had no distracting fancies about crocodiles – and when he saw it dash off and his master instantly jump in after it, he must have thought that the hunt had at last begun and that he was expected to help.

After all that row and excitement there was not much use in trying for anything more in the reeds – and indeed I had had quite enough of them for one afternoon; so we wandered along the upper banks in the hope of finding something where there were no crocodiles, and it was not long before we were interested in something else and able to forget all about the duiker.

Before we had been walking many minutes, Jock raised his head and ears and then lowered himself into a half crouching attitude and made a little run forward. I looked promptly in the direction he was pointing and about two hundred yards away saw a stembuck standing in the shade of a mimosa bush feeding briskly on the buffalo grass. It was so small and in such bad light that the shot was too difficult for me at that distance, and I crawled along behind bushes, ant-heaps and trees until we were close enough for anything. The ground was soft and sandy, and we could get along easily enough without making any noise; but all the time, whilst thinking how lucky it was to be on ground so soft for the hands and knees, and so easy to move on without being heard, something else was happening. With eyes fixed on the buck I did not notice that in crawling along on all-fours, the muzzle of the rifle dipped regularly into the sand, picking up a little in the barrel each time. There was not enough to burst the rifle, but the effect was surprising. Following on a painfully careful aim, there was a deafening report that made my head reel and buzz; the kick of the rifle on the shoulder and cheek left me blue for days; and when my eyes were clear enough to see anything the stembuck had disappeared.

I was too disgusted to move, and sat in the sand rubbing my shoulder and thanking my stars that the rifle had not burst. There was plenty to think about, to be sure, and no hurry to do anything else, for the noise of the shot must have startled every living thing for a mile round.

It is not always easy to tell the direction from which a report comes when you are near a river or in broken country or patchy bush; and it is not an uncommon thing to find that a shot which has frightened one animal away from you has startled another and driven it towards you; and that is what happened in this case. As I sat in the shade of the thorns with the loaded rifle across my knees there was the faint sound of a buck cantering along in the sand; I looked up; and only about twenty yards from me a duiker came to a stop, half fronting me. There it stood looking back over its shoulder and listening intently, evidently thinking that the danger lay behind it. It was hardly possible to miss that; and as the duiker rolled over, I dropped my rifle and ran to make sure of it.

Of course, it was dead against the rules to leave the rifle behind; but it was simply a case of excitement again: when the buck rolled over everything else was forgotten! I knew the rule perfectly well – Reload at once and never part with your gun. It was one of Rocky's lessons, and only a few weeks before this, when out for an afternoon's shooting with an old hunter, the lesson had been repeated. The old man shot a rietbuck ram, and as it had been facing us and dropped without a kick we both thought that it was shot through the brain. There was no mark on the head, however, and although we examined it carefully, we failed to find the bullet-mark or a trace of blood; so we put our rifles down to settle the question by skinning the buck. After sawing at the neck for half a minute, however, the old man found his knife too blunt to make an opening, and we both hunted about for a stone to sharpen it on, and while we were fossicking about in the grass there was a noise behind, and looking sharply round we saw the buck scramble to its feet and scamper off before we had time to move. The bullet must have touched one of its horns and stunned it. My companion was too old a hunter to get excited, and while I ran for the rifles and wanted to chase the buck on foot he stood quite

still, gently rubbing the knife on the stone he had picked up. Looking at me under bushy eyebrows and smiling philosophically, he said:

“That’s something for you to remember, Boy. It’s my belief if you lived for ever there’d always be something to learn at this game.”

Unfortunately I did not remember when it would have been useful. As I ran forward the duiker tumbled, struggled and rolled over and over, then got up and made a dash, only to dive head foremost into the sand and somersault over; but in a second it was up again and racing off, again to trip and plunge forward on to its chest with its nose outstretched sliding along the soft ground. The bullet had struck it in the shoulder, and the broken leg was tripping it and bringing it down; but, in far less time than it takes to tell it, the little fellow found out what was wrong, and scrambling once more to its feet was off on three legs at a pace that left me far behind. Jock, remembering the mistake in the reeds, kept his place behind, and I in the excitement of the moment neither saw nor thought of him until the duiker, gaining at every jump, looked like vanishing for ever. Then I remembered and, with a frantic wave of my hand, shouted, “After him, Jock.”

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